AMBERZINE

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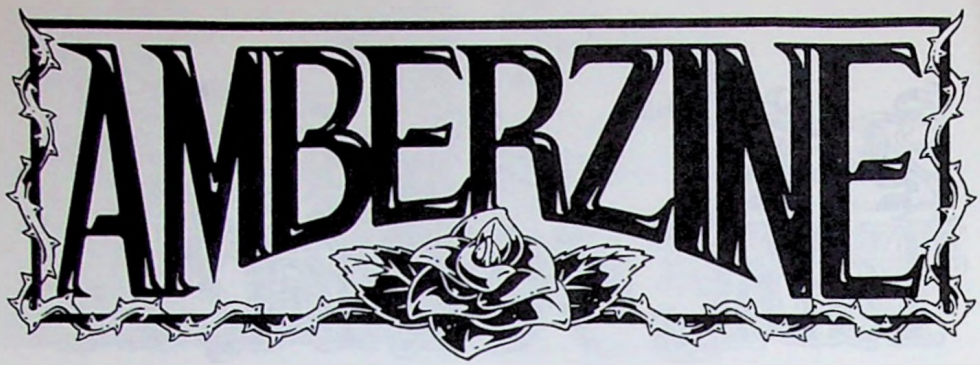

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Dear Erick,

Amberzine is *wonderful!!* It has sparked numerous ideas in me as both Game Master and player. However, I do have a few questions...

1. What about technology? One can spend points on, say, a machine gun or a laser gun, but how far can this be carried out? What I mean is, since technology is fickle about what Shadow it operates in (like magic), can points be spent on a piece of high-tech stuff to allow it to operate in more, or maybe even most Shadows. Then, what about different gradients in technology; surely a Vulcan plasma-rifle would cost more points than a mere 22-pistol. Not only that, but rate of fire would also seem to change the value of an item; anywhere from a single-action hand gun to something that spews out bullets at an alarming rate. Or should I even allow my players to spend points on technology of such power?

2. I am curious to know what you, as Game Master, would do about the use of powerful artifacts such as the Jewel or one of the nine Spikards? The Jewel and the Spikards both seem capable of spell storing, but what about their instantaneous effects. These artifacts created spell-effects by just drawing from power around them or in their wielder, no hanging required. Is this really fair? The way I have figured it is that before creating any magical effect, the player must first have the discipline in that area (someone wanting to teleport must first have Sorcery,

someone wanting to summon or create items or creatures must first have Conjuration).

3. Finally, I was wondering about future books (such as *Shadow Knight* or *Chaos Rules!*) if there will be outlines of totally new powers, such as Brand's "Keep of the Four Worlds" and the magical Font. Or maybe even powers not used at all in the *Amber* series.

Michael R. Fender
Shorewood, Wisconsin

1. My standard answer is, it's up to the Game Master.

When I run, I generally let the players have virtually anything they can come up with. After all, Amber is a role-playing system of potential, not limits. Any tech weapon is potentially deadly, regardless of range, lethality or rate of fire.

Let's face it, no mere weapon compares with real power.

If you've read "Carolan's Diary" in ***Amberzine #2****, you've probably noticed that Morgan uses energy weapons. Sometime soon you'll read of how he murdered Deirdre's son, and* ***then*** *discovered that his weapon should not have worked, but that someone had done a little manipulation to allow it to function...*

One way of looking at this whole problem is to realize that the elder Amberites (and likely the Lords of Chaos as well) have been using these weapons for hundred of years. They know the problems, and they've already arrived at a sort of truce. In one campaign, I set it up so that the more tech stuff the player characters came up with, the more hideous and outrageous hardware they'd spot in the hands of the tools of the elder Amberites (imagine how Benedict might arm his troops if he felt the truce was violated).

2. As to whether these items are capable of storing spells, that's something that's definitely up to each Game Master. I've run campaigns where it would work, and others where it absolutely would not (i.e.: what if the Jewel consumed any power directed inside of it?).

Their instantaneous effects are something that I usually let come easy to the player characters. Perhaps too easy, since I like to let the items occasionally do something that the player character didn't expect. This keeps them on their toes, makes them realize that they may not have full control (after all, even Corwin could control the Jewel of Judgement from a distance), and may be turning them into the pawns of others.

3. You'll see a handful of examples of new powers in ***Shadow Knight****, and I've got plans to do extensive additions to the known powers, as well as wholly new powers (such as "WILL," which will be covered in* ***Beyonders****) in the other books.*

Dear Erick,

Thanks so much for the speedy and helpful reply to my last letter. Since then, however, I've gotten a few more questions that I'd be interested in a party line on.

First, during my Attribute

Auction I was overly successful in goading players to spend points on the 'weak two' Attributes, Strength and Endurance. The problem occurred when despite any encouragement, Warfare sold the number one slot for six points. This is fine with me as far as the characters go, but I have non-player character conceptions from the player's generation who I perceive as having much higher scores, particularly compared to the elders. The question: how set in stone is the number one slot in terms of NPCs? I would hate to gyp the winner by having others of his generation exceed him but, likewise, I want to have NPCs who could potentially beat at least Llewella in combat.

The second question springs forth from the first in that another set of friends who live in California (where I'll be moving in July) want to be in the campaign when I transfer out there, but they don't want to be limited by the weak bidding in the original Auction. Since after the move, most of the present player characters will have to shuffle back into obscurity, I'm wondering what I can do that will allow my new players to develop strong, central characters, while not ruining the older players' characters. My best thought is to run a second Auction, with starting bids beginning at the point value of the first. How have you dealt with changing players or groups?

Thanks for the time and thought!

Douglass Barré
Westfield, New Jersey

"Overly successful in goading players?!?!"

Impossible! There's no such thing. Obviously, since you've crippled their Warfare Attributes, you've done your job very well. After all, making things difficult for players is the Game Master's sacred duty.

Remember, the players should get the kind of campaign that they've paid for. So, for example, if someone gets Shape Shifting, then there should be interesting things for Shape Shifters to do.

Likewise, if a whole group wimps out on Warfare, then they are asking what it will be like to have to run like scared bunnies most of the time (hee hee).

This isn't all that bad for the player who bid six points. He'll be able to lord it over all the other players, plus he'll likely have the luxury of a few parries of his blade against the NPCs before he starts spilling his vital fluids.

Yes, you hate to "gyp the winner," but you also have a responsibility to present Amber as best you can. Since they've squandered their points elsewhere, they'll have to find ways around their little problem.

As for your second question...

If I were you, I'd tell the California people that they'll be facing a whole new campaign, and Attribute Auction, when you get out there in July. Use the fact that you may be "borrowing" certain elements from your New Jersey campaign as an excuse to avoid discussing what's happening now.

There are a couple of reasons for this.

First, by July you will have probably developed a whole bunch of new ideas on how to run Amber and how a campaign should be organized. By notifying the California folks of a new campaign, you won't be disappointing anyone when you scrap the old campaign.

Second, it's a nice piece of Game Master deception. When I ran the first play-test of Amber, back in 1985, I had an initial Attribute Auction of some twenty players. I solemnly vowed that there would be two separate groups, in two entirely different campaigns. In other words, "trust me, I'm the Game Master."

I lied.

If you decide you want to keep your old campaign going, fine. Eventually the California players will discover they've been duped. Otherwise, by starting a new campaign, you've lost nothing.

Amber Q & A

On initial reading, basic Shapechanging seems to suffice for a character who wants occasionally to grow claws, fur, or armor, without any particular regard for a particular animal or creature form (my interpretation of *Shape Body Parts*); but the Shapechanging ability to selectively alter skin to scales, fingers into talons, etc. seems to be covered by *Shape Shift to Animal Abilities* in Advanced Shape Shifting. Could you go into more detail about your intention of abilities between Basic and Advanced Shape Shifting in regards to impromptu and selective alteration of body properties? Is Basic Shapechanging enough?

Pat Sponaugle
Columbia, Maryland

I'm very grateful! I hadn't noticed that the section in Advanced Shape Shifting fell so short.

Yes, anyone with Shape Shifting should be able to grow claws, fur, armor, and even wings or gills. However, just because a character grows the physical feature doesn't mean they'll have the skill to use it.

Take flight as an example. It's one thing to grow wings, another thing altogether if you want to use them to fly. Someone with Basic Shape Shifting can turn into the imitation of a bird (Shape Shift Animal Forms) and fly. The same character can just grow wings on top of their human form, but that won't give them any of a bird's flying skill or talent (though, with practice, it's possible to learn).

On the other hand, the Advanced Shape Shifter can grow wings on their human body, and be able to Shape Shift selectively so as to gain the bird's flying abilities.

What can I do with the elder Amberites now that most of them have just about every Power in the book at about Advanced with very high attributes?

David C. Kubanek Jr.
Flushing, Michigan

Remember that you are role-playing a family.

When you were eight years old how did you relate to the adults in your family? Sure, they didn't share your problems, they had problems of their own. Still, they were important, these people who completely over-shadowed you in size, strength, knowledge and power, but they were a very important part of your life.

For example, my father would talk to me about physics, engineering and astronomy. Not all at once, but a bit at a time, challenging my ideas and stretching my imaginary view of the universe. He'd encourage me to stand up for myself, but he never actually interfered in my childhood fights or problems. When he was angry or drunk he scared me, but he never have hurt me in any way. He lived a life I could barely understand, and sometimes he was gone altogether, but he was vitally important to me.

In ***Amberzine*** *#1, in "Bronwyn's Tale," Bronwyn's father is Bleys. She started out hating her father, a guy who was never around when she and her mother needed him, and he didn't even show up for her mother's funeral. As the campaign continued Bronwyn kept seeing her father at odd moments, often involved in things she couldn't understand.*

Recently she found him in some strange sanctuary, seemingly in a coma. When she touched him, she joined his mind in a strange realm, where Bleys was manipulating the powers of many different versions of the Pattern. She found that he was devoting much of his life to protecting Amber's pattern, and that he had no choice but to be gone for most of the time.

Now Bronwyn knows that her father leads a very complicated life. Yet, powerful as he is, she knows that Bleys can sometimes be completely vulnerable, and that she could save his life, or endanger it, by her own actions.

Just as adult relatives played an important part in your childhood, so the elders should play important roles in the lives of your characters.

---

1. How can Vialle use a Trump card in *Sign of Chaos*? In fact it states a few pages later that Coral may have been unable to use her Trump of Merlin because of her dark surroundings.

2. In ***Sign of Chaos*** Merlin pins a Trump to his sleeve... Trumps are supposed to be nearly indestructible. Or an you place small holes and punctures in them, perhaps as long as the Trump image is not damaged?

Mark J. Haas
Flushing, Michigan

1. Here's a quote from **Sign of Chaos**:

"Then let's be about this," she said, raising her left hand, which I saw to contain a Trump. "Come over here, please."

Luke approached her and I followed him. I could see then that it was Julian's Trump that she held.

"Place your hand upon my shoulder," she told him.

"All right."

He did, and she reached, found Julian and began speaking to him. Shortly, Luke was party to the conversation, explaining what he intended to do. I overheard Vialle saying that the plan had her approval.

Notice that Vialle didn't make the call until she was in physical contact with Luke?

Is she using his eyes? Using a Psychic connection to spy through his senses? Possibly...

Or maybe she's just cultivated a new talent... Or maybe she's just not blind anymore...

2. I'll weasel out of this one by pointing out that you needn't puncture a card when you "pin it" to a piece of material. Just picture how you'd use pins at two corners, in each case through the fabric, then over the corner of the card, and then back into the fabric. Any seamstress can describe a few other ways of "pinning" without puncturing.

In the *Designing New Powers* section (page 117), is the point cost system correct? Using this system the cost for even a minor Power seems high.

Tedd A. Peterson
Hastings, Minnessota

Correct. The multipliers create very large numbers when putting together new Powers. However, recall that pages 117 to 119 are within the "Game Master Mechanics" section.

After all, do you think that Dworkin, in creating the Primal Pattern, spent a measly 50 (or even 150) points?

Not likely!

As a Game Master you can bring the points down to player scale by several methods. Consider first the possibility that the new Power is shared, just as player characters can reduce their costs by sharing personal Shadows or items.

For example, let's say that an extra-dimensional creature, akin to the Unicorn, created some Power that was an alternative to Trump. That creature would pay a whole lot of points. Characters, player or no, learning to manipulate the creature's power would pay a fraction of that amount. The only way to evaluate the character points is by determining the motivations, goals and degree of interest of the creature.

Or, you might use the item quantity multipliers in reverse. Therefore a single controlling being (like a pre-Oberon Dworkin) would have to bear the full brunt of the cost. It would be cheaper for Named & Numbered users (the rarified few who have the advanced form?) since they would only pay half. Then a Horde of initiates pay just one third and so forth...

I must confess that I deliberately kept New Power section opaque. Players, especially first-time players, have their hands full just with the basic Powers. Rather than opening the door for greedy, point-oriented players to pester their

Game Masters, I made the process of creating Powers seem prohibitively expensive.

Say there are two player characters and an opponent. All have an Attribute of, say, 40. One of the player characters is rated number 1, and the other is rated 1.5th. The question is, which one (if either) is superior to the opponent? How would you rate the opponent.

Neil A Fraser
St Peter's, South Australia

Neil, where did this "opponent" come from?

That's a trick question, so think of two answers before proceeding...

Done?

Okay. First off, if the "opponent" is, say, an elder Amberite, hundreds of years older than the player characters, then the opponent is likely to have reached "40" before either of them, and would be the best of the three. Ditto for a Lord of Chaos. Whereas a younger sibling might be inferior to #1 (but, I'd say, likely equal to the 1.5, just 'cause that's my rule of thumb).

All of which is the ***wrong*** *answer.*

The "opponent" came from you, the Game Master. You invented the "opponent," knowing full well that this encounter might come about. So why are you tormenting yourself creating such an ambiguous situation? Unless, of course, you've got a good reason for ambiguity in the story line...

You say, "the only other way out that I can see is to rate everyone in the universe relative to each other!" Yes, exactly! It's not "impossible," because ***you are the Game Master, and the only characters that exist are the ones you control!***

Everyone? Amber usually has a relatively small cast of characters. Even in my "main line" campaigns there probably aren't more than three dozen significant NPCs.

Answering "how does this generation's number one compare to that generation's number one?" is simple. Just use the raw numbers.

I have a problem in my campaign that I still have difficulty in solving. It involves the Warfare Attribute. I understand that a character with a Warfare of 50 can easily defeat one with Amber rank. However, what if four characters with Amber rank ganged up on the one with the 50? Who would win? One of my players, Rogar, has a 50 in Warfare and once faced three Shadow creatures, each with a Warfare of 25. Because they combined to 75 points, I declared that they would eventually win if the battle continued using Warfare.

This *addition* method may work well under normal circumstances, but problems arise when Amber rank and lower are involved. If one Amber ranked player was fighting 5 Chaos ranked creatures, the addition seems to fall apart. Five creatures each at -10 gives... -50. I can't justify to myself that one Chaos ranked creature has a better chance of winning against an

Amber level than five do! How does one handle multiple Warfare combat? For that matter, any kind of combat could involve multiple combatants, including Strength and Psyche. Would they work the same way? I know that each individual Game Master has the ultimate decision, but if I can't justify my actions to myself, I don't feel right using them on the players. Any insights would be greatly appreciated.

Mark MacKinnon
Guelph, Ontario

Okay.

Let's picture Rogar, just waking up from a pleasant night's sleep, when four servants (Human in Warfare) enter his room...

GM: "You awake to the instant evaluation of the tactical situation. Your trusted man-servant is carrying in a vase of new-cut flowers, and he is followed by three other servants, two carrying breakfast trays, and the last bearing a pile of fresh towels. The bacon and eggs smell wonderful. What are you doing?"

Rogar: "I'll say good morning, and prop myself up to have breakfast in bed."

GM: "Your man-servant, who seems nervous for some reason, clumsily starts to spill the vase of flowers. You're going to get soaked unless you do something..."

Rogar: "Am I quick enough to catch the flowers?"

GM: "With your incredible skill and reflexes? You can if you want to. One hand if you want to take a chance, or both hands if you want 100% safety."

Rogar: "Then I'll catch the vase with both hands."

GM: "At that exact moment, just as you catch the vase, all three servants, two on each side of your bed, drop what they were carrying, revealing business-like short swords. Your man-servant is reaching towards your throat with bare hands extended."

Rogar: "What!?!"

GM: "Wasn't I clear? You've got a guy trying to grab you, three guys trying to stab you, and a vase in your hands. Plus, off course, you realize that there are two doors, a large window, some flimsy walls, and a ceiling, that could yield even more attackers. What are you doing?"

Rogar: "What about my weapons? I always keep certain things under my pillow!"

GM: "Yes, it's probable that your dagger and trump deck are still under your pillow. Of course, by the time you reach them one or more of your attackers may succeed... What are you doing?"

Rogar, if he makes the wrong decisions, because he's already been careless (he didn't follow up on that "tactical situation" clue), could be defeated by four guys Human-ranked in Warfare.

Or, if he plays it well (say, grabbing one guy and using him as a shield against the others), he'll

probably turn the tables and come out okay. Against these Human Warfare guys.

If all four were Chaos level, it might not be so easy. At Amber Warfare, the four become a very real, very ***lethal*** *threat.*

Now let's look at a completely different situation. Rogar, facing five Hellmaidens and Chaos Lords (each with Warfare ranging from Amber to 45), stands on a rock-strewn slope, huge boulders scattered around like toys left by a careless child. Since he knew he was walking into danger, he automatically let his Warfare guide him into an advantageous stance, so he is up-slope from his potential opponents:

GM: "Your soul, departed from your body, is all that will ever leave this place, says the one in blue armor, as she raises her battleaxe and charges forward."

Rogar: "Damn. Give me that tactical run-through again! What does Rogar see?"

GM: "You're facing five armored Chaosites, but the closest is the one who is charging you. You judge the weakest & slowest to be the one with the crossbow (though you shouldn't expose yourself to his ranged shot), only the one in blue and the one in the Black & Silver to be really close to your skill. Since you are above them on the slope, you can engage her for at least two clashes of your weapons before any others come into range. You have enough distance to avoid her and flank the group, or you can retreat into the boulders."

Rogar: "What kind of retreat options do I see?"

GM: "The best would be where two boulders are squeezed together. Once there, only one person could engage you at a time..."

Rogar: "Even from above? I've seen these gals fly before..."

GM: "Assuming that you need air cover, you can sprint over to a boulder that has an overhang. From there you'd have to deal with two at a time, but your back would be covered, and attacks from above would be negated."

Y'see? If Rogar plays his cards right, if he makes the right choices, not only could he win, he could even kill all five of his high-ranking opponents.

For example, a smart move would be to skewer (maybe with a thrown dagger?) the crossbow-wielder first, then try for a quick kill on the attacking axe-maiden, then retreat, etc... Or just disarm the lady in blue, and, with a blade to her throat "negotiate" with the others.

On the other hand, if he tries duking it out in the open, where he can be attacked from all sides, and from a ranged weapon, and (possibly) from above, he's likely going to lose.

Amber *doesn't, and shouldn't, have "rules" that mandate the results of anything based on pure numbers.*

The combat system is based on checking out one opponent against

another. Ideally when there's a straight shoving match, where all things are dead even, and where the combatants are locked in place, then the ranks rule supreme.

Terrain, numbers, and circumstances are used to evaluate each potential move.

Mostly, almost always, things have to be interpreted, and broken down by the Game Master into decision "increments."

You said it yourself, "I know that each individual Game Master has the ultimate decision..."

Think about it.

Why do you have the ultimate decision?

Because only you can imagine the scene, interact with the player, offer ***all*** *the appropriate choices, and then make a determination.*

And each determination should be on a case by case basis.

One move at a time.

Yes, Rogar dueling Martin is one case.

A human-ranked sword-wielder sticking Rogar in the back while he is occupied with two other enemies is another case.

And a 45 point Hellmaiden on charging hell-bent uphill (bad move, that), on a well armed and prepared Rogar is another single decision...

If, during a campaign, a character picks up information that they shouldn't have from the carelessness of another player, like how to identify at Trump call, should I penalize the character (give them partial Trump Artistry and take ten points of Good Stuff)? Or just say, `sorry, that doesn't seem to work?

Dean Jones
Surrey, England

Two answers here.

First off, I try to conduct a general mis-information campaign. Any information, from any source should be suspect. After all, just because a player hears something from another player, it doesn't make it ***true****. When I see players using such ill-gotten gains, the results are often sour...*

As for attempting to use powers that haven't been learned (or paid for), I generally try to lead the player into increasingly more hazardous details. Using your example of the detection of Trump sources, I'd have the player describe ***exactly*** *what the character was attempting to do...*

GM: You're getting a Trump call. Are you taking it?

Player: Who is calling?

GM: You have no idea.

Player: I know! I'll try touching each of the cards in my deck, to see if I can sense who is making the call.

GM: You're going to do that?

Player: Yes! Who is calling.

GM: All the cards just feel sort of cool, though you think you might tell a bit more if you opened up your mind and senses a bit more.

Player: Okay, I'll do it that way.

GM: Wow! Suddenly the caller seems obvious.

Player: Who is it?

GM: It's Bleys! By opening yourself up to his card you seem to

have dropped any and all forms of Psychic defense. Before you know it he has departed from your mind.

Player: What? What did he do?

GM: You don't know, he seemed very satisfied. And somehow your thoughts are clouded, as if he's been rearranging your mental furniture...

...one of my players purchased a Spikard during character development at these costs:

Variable Energy Bonus	[10 Points]
Powered by Abyss & Shadow	[4 Points]
Matter/Energy Manipulation	[3 Points]
Spell Multiplexing Engine	[2 Points]
Psychic Sensitivity	[1 Point]
Pretty Cheap...	[20 Points]

It seems like a very powerful item, but based upon the costs of the items possessed by the elder Amberites, doesn't seem too far off. How would you construct one?

Shane Jackson
Medford, Oregon

If ever there was a question that begged a near-infinite response... well, I hardly know where to start, but I won't presume to question the wisdom of allowing such an item in the first place...

"Variable Energy Bonus" is, as you aptly put it, quite a general catch-all. As it runs 10 points it must be pretty powerful...

I'm not sure what you mean by "Powered by Abyss & Shadow." Intuitively I suspect that this has something to do with how you've ordered the physical laws in your campaign.

"Matter/Energy Manipulation" might be better described as some subset of Shadow Manipulation. Perhaps "Mold Shadow Stuff - Fast" at 2 points.

I like the next one a lot. "Spell Multiplexing Engine" is, as you point out, a ***very*** *powerful ability. Wouldn't this be, logically, something along the lines of a item's advanced Magic Power? I could see something like:*

1 Point - Rack a Spell
2 Points - Named & Numbered Spells
4 Points - Rack & Use Spells
8 Points - Horde of Spells
16 Points - Spell Multiplexing Engine

This scheme would eliminate the need for a few of the other costs, so you'd still get a Spikard for 20 points or less.

As to how I might construct a Spikard, here's a simple 10 point version:

Psychic Sensitivity	*[1 Points]*
Horde of Shadows	*[8 Points]*

I'd assume that the Psychic Sensitivity applies **only** to the item's connection with its Shadows. The Shadows would each be Personal (1 Point), each have a Communication Conduit (Communication Barrier in reverse-1 Point), and Control of Contents (specifically, the Power of each Shadow -1 Point). Assume there are a Horde of these Shadows (times 3), and you end up with a 9 Points for the Horde of Shadows.

Voila! 10 Points for a Spikard. or make 'em Named & Numbered, and it's 20 Points for the batch.

by Chuck Knakal

*"**The Jewel of Judgement.** The main mystic artifact of the Amber universe, and most prized possession of the throne. Look within its depths and you will see a three dimensional version of the Pattern..."*

Amber Diceless Role-Playing, page 37

Roger Zelazny and Erick Wujcik have teased us by pointing out that Pattern is definitely larger than the two dimensional representation in the Pattern room. Several times we have seen references to the three dimensional aspects or shape of Pattern, but minimal details have been given.

As an advanced user of Pattern, you may decide to look into this. It may increase your ability to bend Pattern to your will or perhaps it will allow you to tap Pattern energy with greater ease. At the very least you could amaze the other players.

By the same token, the GM that commands a firm understanding of the *shape* of the universe, can provide a richness of detail for the players and a confounding set of problems for those that insist on living in a two dimensional world. The third dimension can also be a source for your alternate Ambers, where you can conceptualize and define what connections between patterns may look like.

Let's visualize.

Start with the standard Amber Pattern as two dimensional and flat. A three dimensional Pattern has some greater type of shape to it. To keep things simple, assume that a three dimensional Pattern has a roughly spherical form. The standard Amber Pattern could be represented by a "slice" through that three dimensional shape.

Having this conceptual model we can speculate that creatures (or family members) with other patterns may just come from a different slice of the bigger Pattern shape.

Change your point of view and you could picture how each line viewed in the flat Pattern may actually be part of some three dimension surface extending up and down from your Pattern. This viewpoint allows you to visualize pocket universes or pocket shadows as little domains between the lines of Pattern.

Here is another concept, let's assume that I don't want to use my advanced Pattern ability to just "blip" to a distant Pattern slice. A hell ride may be long and difficult, since it would involve travel outside

of the two dimensional Amber reality. What if I just create a path or road running from one Pattern slice to another. Travel via this road may be very similar to travel on the Black Roads. This is the type of conceptual framework you can build by viewing Pattern as a three dimensional shape, then structuring your role-playing around that.

GM: So, now you are at the Pattern room, what do you want to do?
Bill: I want to go to another Pattern, where my father is King and I am crown prince.
GM: Think about some details of the place, but for now tell me how you are going to get there.
Bill: I don't want to wait until I get to the center, I want the Pattern to know as soon as I start to walk that I plan on going to this other Pattern.
GM: Okay. Are you going to walk the Pattern now?
Bill: Yes. I'm stepping on.
GM: The usual sparks flare up. As you walk you notice something different.
Bill: What?
GM: The Pattern chamber seems to be getting taller and less substantial.
Bill: Do I have a bad feeling?
GM: You think you are going to the Pattern you wanted to. In fact you notice the floor is close to your face now.
Bill: I'm still walking, right? I didn't fall, so what is going on.
GM: It seems like you have walked down into the Pattern.
Bill: Is that why the Pattern room seems less substantial?
GM: Probably. You don't think you're fully in your old Pattern anymore.
Bill: Where am I?
GM: You seem to be walking the Pattern and you are about 3/4's of the way to the center. Do you want to look around in awe and wonder or concentrate on where you are going?

Now that we have a framework for a three dimensional Amber, let's examine a favorite scenario, Alternate Amber's! Do you assume alternate Amberites are coming from some shadow in Amber? Should we assume that they are very close parallel slice to our own Amber? Or could they be from matching slices in some other three dimensional shapes that is separate from our Amber reality? What can we do with this concept of multiple three dimensional shapes? To me a fundamental question might be:

"What is the relationship between these three dimensional shapes?"

To me, it's interesting to define or figure out how the different three dimensional shapes might relate to each other. There can be a wide range of possibilities. To demonstrate that, I am going to propose four possible relationships between the shapes. For each one we'll then explore what it may mean to the players, GM, and to the structure of the game. For discussion purposes I am going to

name four theoretical relationships; *Cluster*, *Series*, *Phase Twist* and *Virtual*.

Clusters

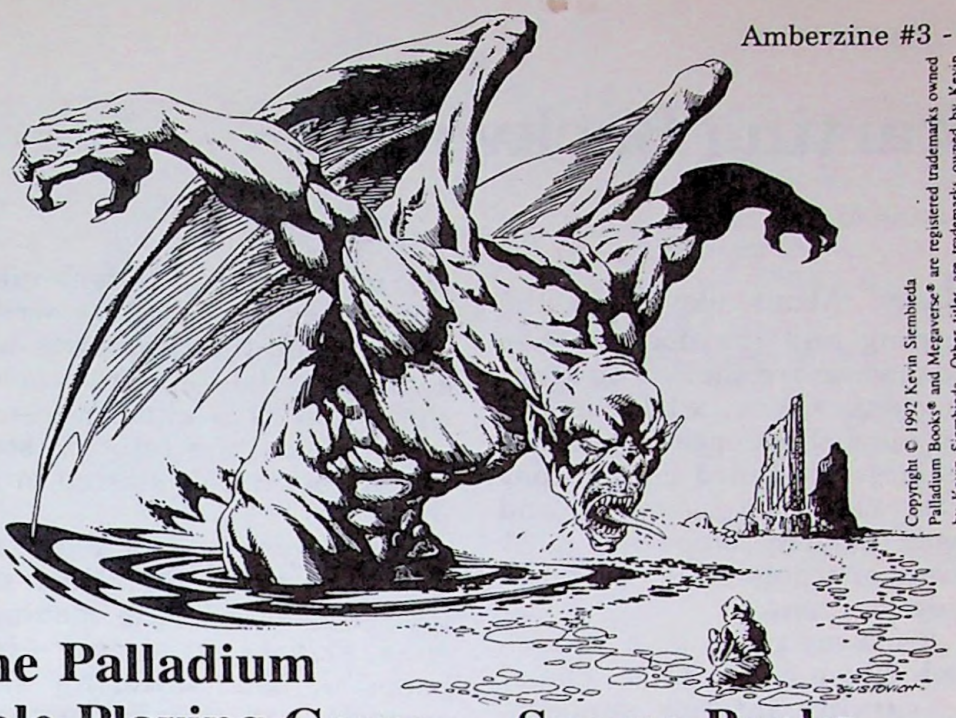
In this theory, assume that each shape is more or less spherical and that each resultant sphere is attached to something. That something can be like a pipe or a stem. Each stem collects up with other stems, perhaps into branches. This can result in a group of Amber shapes linked together via their stems into a cluster. Clusters can be linked to form a bunch. Yep, reality could be like a bunch of grapes (white or red is left to you), or perhaps apples on a tree. The point is we now have a framework to build a model of reality and some potential game scenarios around. Players may someday find a way to move outside of the two dimensional Amber to other patterns (slices). That may eventually lead someone to a vast portal or causeway (the stem). A traveller down a stem may go to another nearby shape (grape) or wander the causeways (stems) looking for other things, like branches or leaves. A creative GM can define the type of Pattern reality in a leaf shape (maybe it is only two dimensional or only can contain one Pattern). Who or what may reside in branches and/or stems? Thinking about this ahead of time should make it easier for a GM to describe travel between Pattern shapes. Asking "How are you going to get there?" can really help the GM to figure out how to describe what is experienced or seen.

Figuring out what these stems are like and where they are located can lead to many interesting possibilities. Perhaps the stem is located in some remote cave on the edge of Patterh. Or perhaps in a vortex just under the Primal Pattern. Others have speculated that the Abyss is the connecting media of the Patterns. I've even heard it said that really massive Logrus tendrils interlink and balance the forces of Pattern. Who knows?

Once an Advanced Pattern player is able to visualize the framework of the "universe" he or she can look for potential situations to exploit. For example, the spot on the outside of a grape that touches the next grape could be exploited as a weak spot or a short cut to another Pattern reality.

The Game Master also has a mental framework to help explain what a player may find and how they may move around. It can also provide a fertile field for reaping very interesting game scenarios. Travellers/invaders/outcasts can come from another Pattern fruit. How would your players deal with a systemic disease of the whole plant, analogous to a fungus or insect attack and what would it be like inside Pattern to experience that disease?

Chuck Knakal created *Herdan*, a character based on Pattern Engineering, back at the first *Amber* Attribute Auction in 1985. In his next column he'll discuss more perspectives on three-dimensional Pattern.



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Starting Backwards

by Jane M. Lindskold

Misty. About eleven in the morning and the doe and her two fawns have showed up again for class. Owen, who has the best view of the meadow behind the large, screened gazebo that is the classroom, gestures and Roger Zelazny stops his most recent anecdote to let everyone enjoy the scene.

From my perch on a wooden stool, I lean back against one of the curving interior supports and watch as a fawn pounces his sibling with the exuberant enthusiasm that I already associate with kittens, puppies, and two year-olds. Listening to Roger resume talking about writing, I hear something of that same exuberance in his deep voice.

When Roger invited me to assist him this past August teaching a course on writing science fiction and fantasy at the Omega Institute in Rhinebeck, New York, I accepted readily. Aside from being delighted to have the opportunity to teach with him, I had ulterior motives. From my research for the Twayne biography, I have already compiled a great deal about what the man has written—this should give me another chance to learn more about what he thinks of the actual process of writing.

One of the first lessons I learn is that Roger views himself as an intuitive writer. This means that he starts with some impulse—for his novels this often is a character—and lets it guide him into the story. The Amber novels started in just this way.

Zelazny says that he met Corwin in the same fashion that the reader does at the opening of *Nine Princes in Amber*—in a hospital bed suffering from amnesia and two broken legs. Writing the scenes where Corwin escapes from the Greenwood Institute, Zelazny gradually developed a feeling for both Corwin's personality and for what events might have gotten him into his present predicament. This lack of control over both character and plot is something that a non-intuitive writer would find intimidating, but for Zelazny discovering the story as it evolves is part of the pleasure involved in writing.

A careful reader of the Amber novels might cut in here with a protest, something like, "But in *Nine Princes in Amber*, Corwin says stuff that indicates that Zelazny must have known where the story was going. How could he have had Corwin say 'and even now, as I stand contemplating the Courts of Chaos, telling this story to the

only one present to hear, that perhaps he may repeat it' (*Chronicles* 78) if he didn't have any idea where the story was going or that everything was going to end with the Patternfall battle at the Courts and that Merlin would be there to hear what he had to tell him?"

Zelazny's answer (which I know because I asked that question) is simply that he "felt" that it was important that Corwin say those words at that point; he trusted that the same impulse that had brought Corwin to him would also explain why these mysterious Courts were important and to whom the story was being told.

And so it did. The Amber books are full of similar tantalizing hints and are part of what makes the entire concept of Amber both so believable and so provocative. I have my favorites questions, but most of the time Zelazny only smiles when I tease for answers. Sometimes I manage to get a partial answer and I'll share a few of the ones I have here.

Who are Delwin and Sand? They are alluded to in *Blood of Amber* when Merlin inspects Luke's Trumps, but Merlin does not encounter Delwin until *Prince of Chaos* and then the meeting is so brief and dreamlike as to only whet the reader's appetite for more. Zelazny refuses to give any other details about these characters, but he did offer that the *Visual Guide to Castle Amber* contains an error in the family tree on page 221. There Delwin and Sand are listed as the children of Oberon and Lora. They are actually, as Merlin notes in *Blood of Amber* on page 115, the children of Oberon and Harla.

> Then the motion subsides and Roger is turned about, smiling at me and nearly unsettling us by reaching too quickly for the bow paddle. Laughing, because he looks as smug as one of my cats, I start paddling again. When he imitates my motion, the light boat races across the smooth lake surface...

Where did Merlin's horse, Tiger, and, presumably, Benedict's Glemdenning come from? This mystery became important to me when I commented that Tiger seemed unnecessary to the action in *Prince of Chaos*. Zelazny's reply was that Tiger's importance would become clear in a later piece.

What adventures did Merlin, Glait, and Kergma share in the Courts? Zelazny has hinted that he'd like to do an entire novel,

perhaps a juvenile, that would involve Merlin, Glait, Kergma, and the opal vase. Another character who may someday get his own novel is Luke. Zelazny commented that Luke "got away" from him as a character.

Questions like these, especially unanswered questions, are an important part of the texture of Amber.

Outside of the gazebo, when we return from lunch for the last two hours of that day's class, the mist has finally cleared. Sprawled on pillows on the carpeted floor, we've been workshopping a variety of pieces written by the eighteen students in the class. Jordan asks us "How much detail does a writer need to give the reader to make a story work? How much does the writer need to know?"

Zelazny answers that he feels that the writer should know more than the reader does about a place or character. In the past, he has written short stories (such as "Dismal Light") to help him understand what a character might do in a given circumstance. Other times the extra detail is trivial—like the fact that Gallinger's (the protagonist of "A Rose for Ecclesiastes") first name is Michael or that Conrad in *This Immortal* is the type of person to go to a child's birthday party.

Later, when class is over, we go walking through the dripping flower and vegetable garden in which Omega grows some of the food for its all vegetarian cafeteria. Roger tells me that there are various details that he has never mentioned in any Amber story but that are as much a part of the characters and setting to him as those details he has given in print. Looking at the rows of tomatoes, cabbages, herbs, and peppers, I desperately wish for something on which to take notes and finally extract a promise that he'll repeat the details in writing.

As I review what he mailed to me, I see that the information ranges from the trivial to that which has serious implications for the future of Amber.

One detail that could be especially useful to role-players is Zelazny's information regarding which languages the senior princes and princesses speak, aside from their native Thari. All of them, except for Llewella, speak English. Corwin, Flora, Benedict, and Fiona are the only ones who speak French, although Random speaks a little from having played gigs in Paris. Corwin is also fluent in Japanese, Russian, and German, and, because of his long residence there, speaks several other shadow Earth languages less well. Benedict, however, is the linguist of the group. He speaks and reads Japanese, Spanish, German, Russian, and Mandarin. He has some Cantonese and reads Greek and Latin.

Zelazny says that the most

underestimated character in Amber is Flora. He says that she is much tougher and much smarter than she seems, but that neither Corwin nor Merlin have created circumstances where they have had the opportunity to bring this out. He adds that Tom Canty's drawing of Flora, which was later redone as "Lady Frost," looks just like Flora. Canty's picture shows a bit more of the lady's strength than many other artist's renditions.

A more ominous note is that Grayswandir was "something else" before it was a sword. Zelazny says that "the partial image of the Pattern upon Corwin's blade Grayswandir was placed there by the Pattern, for its own protection."

A more ominous note is that Grayswandir was "something else" before it was a sword...

Later, still. The rain that has soaked the grounds for the last week is finally letting up somewhat. Roger and I have finished our class for the day and with the final session tomorrow prepared for are free to wander the now sunlit, if still soggy, grounds. Our ramble takes us down to the lake shore and Roger reminds me of my promise that if the rain let up I would teach him how to paddle a canoe. He had learned to row years ago, as a boy on Lake Erie, but had never been in a canoe. I had learned to handle both on the Chesapeake Bay and had earlier commented that canoes were by far my favorite.

All of the canoes are out, so we sit on the small sand beach and chat while waiting for one to be brought in. As we talk, I wonder if I can still handle a canoe; by my best estimate, I haven't been in one for nearly ten years. This concern is probably why I don't notice until I've pushed us off from the beach and paddled out a few strokes that Roger has gotten into the bow seat backwards and is sitting facing me across the length of the boat.

When I tell him why I'm laughing, he promptly offers to turn around. I glance over the side of the canoe and note that the lake is quite deep and that after all that rain is certain to be quite cold. Hastily, I beg him to stay put, showing him by holding my paddle out to one side how the least motion unsettles the boat's balance.

He agrees, folding his hands over black jeaned legs, but his expression is pensive and as I re-establish my familiarity with handling the canoe I can feel him subtly testing the balance. Finally, he hints that he is certain that he can turn around without spilling us.

My first impulse is to tell him to hold still; my second is to let him go ahead and try. After all, the worst that can happen is that we end up going swimming. With the sun growing increasingly warm, that doesn't seem as bad an idea as it did a few minutes before.

Dragging my paddle through the water, I wait until our forward momentum is about spent before nodding for him to go ahead. Roger is not a large framed man and years of martial arts have given him a fine sense of his center of balance. I counter-balance him by shifting my weight as he slowly turns himself around. We wobble wildly once and I resign myself to going for a dip in blue jeans and tee shirt. At least my shoes and socks are back on the shore.

Then the motion subsides and Roger is turned about, smiling at me and nearly unsettling us by reaching too quickly for the bow paddle. Laughing, because he looks as smug as one of my cats, I start paddling again. When he imitates my motion, the light boat races across the smooth lake surface.

Contrary to my negative predictions, we never do spill over, although we do get snagged a couple of times on the mats of pink and yellow water lilies that crowd parts of the lake. The next day, we have time to go out again. This time, I let Roger take the stern seat and instruct him how to steer. After a few rough turns, he handles that canoe as if he had been canoeing for years.

As we glide along, I study the fish and flowers through the water and reflect that there are worse analogies for the reader's experience with Amber than my adventure of the previous day. With the Amber novels, Roger may seem to be starting all backwards and the process towards discovering what the reader wants to know can be rather rocky, but, if the reader is willing to trust that Zelazny knows where his intuition is taking him, in the end, the result will be as smooth as... well... canoeing on a summer lake.

Dr. Jane M. Lindskold, PhD., just sold her first novel! She calls it *A Brother to Dragons, a Companion to Owls*, pointing out that it's science fiction, *not* fantasy. She won't be surprised if Avon Books changes her title.

Jane has also been busy organizing a new convention in Lynchburg, Virginia. It's called **Kaleidoscope**, and it wil feature Roger Zelazny as Guest of Honor and Erick Wujcik as Gaming Guest of Honor. It's planned for the weekend of September 24th, 1993. Write to Lynchburg S.F. Assoc., 300 Harrison Street, Lynchburg VA 24504 for more information.

Zelazny's Form and Chaos Philosophy

by Carl B. Yoke

Roger Zelazny is a writer of such stature that he needs little introduction to science fiction fans. Since the publication of his first story in 1962, he has won six Hugo and three Nebula Awards, received more than twenty nominations for these prizes, won the French Prix Apollo, and been nominated for both the Gandalf and Ditmar Awards. He has published over a hundred stories, articles, and poems, and nearly fifty novels and collections. In recent years he has collaborated with Robert Sheckley, Fred Saberhagen, and Thomas T. Thomas. He has completed a second *Amber* series all the books are being published on tape. Zelazny has been anthologized and reprinted so many times that even he has lost track. His popularity is assured, his place in science fiction history secure.

His work is generally regarded as highly mythic, heavily symbolic, erudite, poetic, and difficult. His themes are immortality, guilt, love, vanity, sacrifice, revenge, power, and suicide. Though his principal characters are almost always near-gods, they are psychologically credible. His plots are often complicated and clever. His *Amber* novels illustrate this perfectly. As the story unravels, the reader is turned around and around by its revelations.

Certainly this has contributed to his success, as has his ability to create what Theodore Sturgeon calls truly memorable characters in his "Introduction" to *Four for Tomorrow*. But part of that success is also due to a well-conceived philosophical position which encompasses his view of the human condition and provides the conceptual sub-structure for his stories. Zelazny, himself, has labeled it his "form and chaos" philosophy.

In general, it poses two equal but opposite forces at work in the universe. They interact dynamically and forever, and are reflected in all life-forms. One force is called form, the other, chaos.

Form is best defined as the creative urge, the desire to shape, the compulsion to synthesize. It is the process which takes diverse and disconnected raw materials and molds them into a new product. It is reflected in all life-forms, in the arts, and in the evolution of ideas and systems. A specific example of form is anabolism, the metabolic process whereby simple substances are synthesized into the complex materials of living tissue. Another is the arrangement of individual sounds to create music.

Chaos is the opposite force. It is the process of tearing down, of analysis, of breaking down complex materials, ideas, or systems into their simplest

components. It is destruction. It is erosion, decay, and aging. A specific example of chaos is catabolism, the metabolic process whereby complex tissues are reduced to their simplest substances. Another is the erosion of rock by wind or water.

Form and chaos underlie all concepts and things of the universe. Everywhere new products are being formed and old ones destroyed. The forces are mutually supportive. Together, they create never-ending cycles of creation and destruction. The decay of a fallen tree, for example, breaks the wood down into simple, microscopic materials which are themselves combined in the creation of new trees and plants. All things reflect this process, and in living things form and chaos operate simultaneously.

Form and chaos exist without any absolute moral value. They are not, in other words, synonymous with good and evil respectively. Those are the judgments of intelligent beings and may be attached to either force, depending upon the point of view and circumstances of the assessor. The destruction of the deicrat system in *Lord of Light*, for example, while good from Sam's point of view is not from the view of the existing gods. Form and chaos are simply two forces at work to avoid stasis, the one intolerable condition in Zelazny's philosophy. By preventing stasis, they create change, and change is an immutable law in Zelazny's universe.

At any particular time in any particular location, one of the forces will be dominant even though both may be operating simultaneously. Though it may appear that a stasis exists, because the balance between them is so equal, it is only that the rate of action has slowed to such a point that determining which force is dominant is impossible. The breadth of interaction or its subtlety may also prevent detection. Free from manipulation by intelligent beings, form and chaos will maintain a rhythm, swinging back and forth endlessly between extremes, but it is clear in Zelazny's work that intelligent beings can influence the duration, degree, and direction of the interaction.

The cycles of creation, destruction, and re-creation are spiral. In other words, if one could witness a place where a creation had taken place, see it destroyed, and then re-created, the reformation would be different from the original no matter what measures had been taken to restore the previous condition. Though it might appear identical, subtle differences would exist, which would make it unique. I believe that Zelazny would even agree that a clone would be unique because even though it duplicates the pattern of the original, the materials which comprise it are not the same. Though the pattern might indicate that a molecule of carbon be used at a particular point in the construction of a tissue, the specific molecule used will not be the same one as that of the original. Whether or not this is a significant

difference would depend upon particular circumstances.

The rhythm created by the interaction of form and chaos is quite literally universal. Though Zelazny arrived at this idea at an early age, probably as an outgrowth of his own thinking about the relationship between good and evil, his later reading of Havelock Ellis probably helped shape the concept as it eventually appears in "A Rose for Ecclesiastes." Zelazny even alludes to Ellis in his now famous novelette. "Well now, the dance was the highest art, according to Locar, not to mention Havelock Ellis, and I was about to see how their centuries-dead philosopher felt it should be conducted." (182).

Ellis' thinking about the relationship between rhythm and the dance is best expressed in the following passage from his *The Dance of Life*.

> So it is today. We, too, witness a classics-mathematical Renaissance. It is bringing us a new vision of the universe, but also a new vision of human life. That is why it is necessary to insist upon life as a dance. This is not a mere metaphor. The dance is the rule of number and of rhythm and of measure and of order, of the controlling influence of form, of the subordination of the parts to the whole. This is what a dance is. And these same properties also make up the classic spirit, not only in life, but, still more clearly and definitely in the universe itself. We are strictly correct when we regard not only life but the universe as a dance. For the universe is made up of a certain number of elements, less than a hundred, and the "periodic law" of these elements is metrical. They are ranged, that is to say, not haphazardly, not in groups, but by number, and those of like quality appear at fixed and regular intervals. Thus our world is, even fundamentally, a dance, a single metrical stanza in a poem which will be hidden forever from us, except in so far as the philosophers, who are today even here applying the methods of mathematics, may believe that they have imparted to it the character of objective knowledge (x-xi).

To Ellis's general idea, Zelazny adds concepts drawn from Rilke. The great German poet agonized for years over his inability to reconcile the antimonies he saw in life before he hit upon the symbols of the rose and the dance as evidence that they sprang from a common source (Peters, 187). In the dance, he saw not only a symbol of transformation but also a symbol of the rhythm of the universe as generated by the tension created by its eternal oppositions. H. F. Peters makes this point clearly in his analysis of Orpheus in "The Sonnets to Orpheus."

> In Orpheus, the "singing god" of the double kingdom [that

> is, either the light and dark or upper and nether worlds] he [Rilke] had found the symbol for the continuous transformation of the world into rhythmic vibrations; and in the figure of the dancer, both an illustration of that process and the assurance that at the highest level the dichotomy between art and life is resolved (165).

This revelation led Rilke eventually to the idea that an individual must pursue the course of self-fulfillment rather than self--surrender and that this can best be accomplished by fully achieving one's identity rather than by losing it. He comes to praise the uniqueness of the individual and to value it. Finally, he seeks transcendence of self in immanence. For him,

> The figure of the dancer is an illustration of this paradox, for during the ecstacy of the dance the dancer attains both complete self-expression and complete self-surrender... like Orpheus, the dancer is a mediator; he is an artist who thrusts figures into space and a mystic who experiences pure being. Dancing is both an art and a cult (Peters, 171).

Zelazny follows Rilke's lead. For him, the dance becomes the symbol of the rhythm of the universe and the dancer an illustration of complete self-fulfillment within the framework of universal antimonies, represented collectively for him by form and chaos.

As the dancer lives in the closest possible relationship with universal rhythm, Zelazny believes that all men should do likewise. Form and chaos are reflected in man as well as the rhythm they create, and his instinct and intuition will reveal it if he will but trust them. If man can live in harmony with that rhythm, he will achieve self-realization, which will, in turn, bring peace and happiness. Carlton Davits achieves such self-realization in "The Doors of His Face, the Lamps of His Mouth." If man does not, then psychological complexes build up in him which obscure his insight. This is often the case with Zelazny's heroes, and in particular, they suffer from a bad case of vanity. Davits, Charles Render, and Gallinger all reveal this blockage.

Zelazny also recognizes a kind of conservation of form law in his philosophy. Simply stated, all things once formed, tend to try to preserve themselves by resisting chaos. Examples of this in the natural world are: the new growth of plants, the continuous generation of certain human tissues such as blood, the regeneration of some animal parts, and plastic memory. Plastic memory is the tendency of plastic products to want to return to their first forms if slightly heated and re-shaped. This idea agrees with a similar concept from Ellis.

> ...I have never seen the same world twice. That, indeed, is but to repeat the Heraclitian saying... that no man bathes

> twice in the same-stream. Yet—and this opposing fact is fully as significant—we really have to accept a continuous stream as constituted in our minds; it flows in the same direction; it coheres in what is more or less the same shape. Much of the same may be said of the ever-changing bather whom the stream receives. So that, after all, there is not only variety but also unity. The diversity of the Many is balanced by the stability of the One. That is why life must always be a dance, for that is what a dance is: the perpetual slightly varied movements which are yet always held true to the shape of the whole (Ellis, vii).

These then are some of the concepts which make-up Zelazny's form and chaos philosophy, as well as some of their sources. Though this philosophy underlies all of Zelazny's fiction, it is more explicit in some works than in others. An analysis of how it affects three of his better known pieces of fiction follows.

Gallinger's Story: "A Rose for Ecclesiastes"

Zelazny's earliest published novelette, "A Rose for Ecclesiastes," establishes what will become a familiar pattern to science-fiction readers: mythic quality, an abundance of simile and metaphor, ever-present and often frustrating allusions, Biblical references; the themes of vanity, fertility, and love, and the symbols of the rose and the dance. Under close analysis, it also reveals the form and chaos philosophy as its conceptual sub-structure.

The Martians, individually and collectively, are examples of form carried to the extreme, in fact to the point where they are prevented from saving themselves even when offered solution by their own rigidity.

Betty, another linguist in the party, first makes Gallinger aware of the Martians' highly evolved sense of form when she introduces him to M'Cwyie, matriarch of the society.

> "Uh—" she paused, "Do not forget their Eleven Forms of Politeness and Degree. They take matters of form quite seriously..." and "She [M'Cwyie] expects you to observe certain rituals in handling them [the Martian sacred documents], like repeating the sacred words when you turn pages—she will teach you the system" (174).

The initial impression of the Martian concern for form is reinforced later when Gallinger learns that there are two-thousand, two-hundred and twenty-four dances of Locar, that each is highly structured, and that Braxa, the story's heroine, knows them all. Still later, the strength of Martian conviction is dramatically illustrated when Braxa, now pregnant, shocks him by

announcing her own death.

> "You have read the Book of Locar... Death was decided, voted upon, and passed, shortly after it appeared in this form. But long before, the followers of Locar knew. They decided it long ago. 'We have done all things,' they said, 'we have seen all things, we have heard and felt all things. The dance was good. Now let it end'" (207).

Gallinger had just explained that if their child were born normal, it would prove that the Martians could inter-marry with Earthmen and that this would save their race by countering the problem of Martian male sterility.

Both Braxa and the unborn child have been condemned to death, however, by the Temple Mothers because the sacred books say that there can be nothing new, that all things have been said, seen, and done. So strong is the Martian pessimism and so tightly controlled is their thinking that it prevents them from growing, from developing, from seizing the solution to their problem.

But neither form nor chaos is permitted to dominate indefinitely in Zelazny's philosophy. Sooner or later, the subordinate force will take control, and it is the breaking down of old forms that becomes the essence of the novelette.

As mentioned earlier, typical Zelazny characters reflect both form and chaos since the rhythm of the universe is intimately a part of their makeup. They may be alternately creators or destroyers, or they may be creating in one area while simultaneously destroying in another. Such in the case with both Gallinger and Braxa. Both are creating in the course of the story, but both are also instruments for destroying old forms. Often an act of creation is also an act of destruction.

Such is the case with Gallinger who is the ultimate force for destroying Martian society, and in this respect, he mirrors Sam of *Lord of Light*. He destroys their pessimism by showing them something new, a rose. He had had it grown in the hydroponics lab. The Martians had never seen a flower before. He mocks the words of Locar, their highest god, by showing them something new and by restoring their fertility. Moreover, he shows them a way to save their race from imminent doom.

After the chaos that will inevitably come from the destruction of their current values, there will also come a re-formation. And once they learn to grow plants, the Martian landscape will burst forth with new life. Thus, while in the very process of destroying, Gallinger is also presenting means for re-creation.

Braxa too, possesses both capabilities. By bearing Gallinger's child, she presents the first tangible evidence of the new creation, but she is also the mechanism for the destruction of Gallinger's personality as it exists at the onset of the story.

When he first falls in love with

her, he is extremely vain, choosing to hold himself above his colleagues. When he later finds out that Braxa does not love him, that she never has loved him, that she has only conceived their child out of some misconstrued sense of duty, he is shattered. Because of her actions, however, he learns humility, and that newly-acquired humility will permit him to grow as an individual once the trauma has ended.

Zelazny believes that preoccupation with materialistic or egoistic concerns stunts an individual's healthy mental development, and Gallinger is a specific example of this belief. Because of his pride, he is as static as the Martians. He is bound by the warped "form" of his personality. Like the Martians, the blockage must be removed before healthy growth can begin. For the specific dynamics of this psychology, Zelazny is heavily indebted to Carl Jung.

The central irony of the story emerges from the relationship between Braxa and Gallinger. While both of them produce vast destruction by their actions, that very destruction lays the foundation for an even more vast and more significant creation.

Corwin's Story: The 1st Chronicle of Amber

In the original *Amber* series, completed in 1978, Zelazny takes us even deeper into the form and chaos philosophy. Not only does it provide the conceptual basis for the five novels, it also becomes part of the physical world created for them. More specifically, the universe of the story is a metaphor for the philosophy. Geographically, the limits of that universe are Amber, representing form, and Chaos, representing chaos. They are drawn initially as if they were the opposite poles of a continuum, with the forces which they represent vying for control of the shadowlands that lie between them. But that relationship does not speak to the genesis of order or to the ultimate possibilities that exist for the universe.

These questions are addressed by the *Amber* novels, *Nine Princes in Amber*, *The Guns of Avalon*, *The Hand of Oberon*, *The Sign of the Unicorn*, and *The Courts of Chaos*. Two comments in *The Courts of Chaos* provide part of the answer. The first is made by Dara, daughter of Corwin's brother Benedict, and Lintra, leader of the hellmaids, when she explains why the lords of Chaos were willing to make a pact with Brand, another of Corwin's brothers and arch-villain of the story, despite the possibility of dire consequences.

> Brand was given what he wanted... but he was not trusted. It was feared that once he possessed the power to shape the world as he would, he would not stop with ruling over a revised Amber. He would attempt to extend his dominion over Chaos as well. A weaker Amber was what we desired, so that Chaos would be stronger than it is

> now--the striking of a new balance, giving us more control over the shadowlands that lie between our two realms. It was realized long ago that the two kingdoms can never be merged, or one destroyed, without also disrupting all the processes that lie in flux between us. Total stasis or complete chaos would be the result. Yet, though it was seen what Brand had in mind, our leaders came to terms with him. It was the best opportunity to present itself in ages (15-6).

The second is made by Corwin as he wends his way to Chaos.

> The fact that it was easier for us to take a straight course does not make it the only way. We all pursue it so much of the time, though, that we tend to forget that one can also make progress by going in circles... (*Chaos*, 54).

It is clear from these statements that short of destroying the universe completely, form and chaos must remain forever opposed and that change will be the product of their interaction because stasis cannot be permitted. It is also clear that the pattern of their interaction is a rhythmic one with a period of form followed by one of chaos, and that followed by a re-creation, and so on. This is what Corwin means by "going in circles," though for Zelazny a more appropriate terminology might be "upward spirals."

As mentioned earlier, however, the *Amber* novels go one step further than any of Zelazny's other works in amplifying the form and chaos philosophy. Specifically, they pose the ultimate source of all things in the knowable universe as chaos itself. In this belief, Zelazny mirrors both Mesopotamian and Egyptian cosmology (Schwartz, 15-6). Zelazny does acknowledge that something exists beyond the *Amber* universe.

Corwin's creation of a parallel universe when he inscribes a new primal pattern near the end of *The Courts of Chaos* and his comment about Oberon going to the "Old Country," a place defined as being beyond both Amber and Chaos, while he watches his father's funeral procession make it clear that Zelazny believes that the absolute source of all things, for that matter all possibility, lies beyond human understanding. Zelazny has pushed the philosophical basis of the story back to the "first cause," and in doing so, he recognizes the limits of man's ability to comprehend. Whether that "first cause" proves some day to be a white hole or some other yet-to-be-defined singularity, man will always be locked in by his own limitations.

Though Zelazny makes no attempt to go further, he would agree that the "first cause," whatever it is, contains the seeds for all the possibilities of the universe within it and spews these forth in its initial gush. In terms of the *Amber* novels, this means that though all things spring from chaos, the possibilities for form preexist in it.

Dworkin, mad dwarf, artist, inscriber of the original Pattern, and grandfather of the Amber clan, confirms the nature of things in a prolonged discussion with Corwin, whom he believes to be Oberon. It should be noted that Dworkin's error is a logical one since Oberon is a "shapeshifter" and therefore capable of assuming other forms. He does, in fact, deceive Corwin for quite a long time by pretending to be Ganelon. Dworkin argues that the Primal Pattern ought to be destroyed and the whole process begun again while Oberon has argued that it ought to be repaired. (The Pattern defines all order in the universe.) Dworkin says,

> "Destroy the Pattern and we destroy Amber—and all of the shadows in polar array about it. Give me leave to destroy myself in the midst of the Pattern and we will obliterate it. Give me leave by giving your word that you will then take the Jewel which contains the essence of order and use it to create a new Pattern, bright and pure, untainted, drawing upon the stuff of your own being while the legions of chaos attempt to distract you on every side. Promise me that and let me end it, for, broken as I am, I would rather die for order than live for it" (*Oberon*, 60).

This statement supports several axioms that are implemented in the novels: 1) that form and chaos must remain forever opposed, 2) that form is created from chaos, 3) that the conditions for form pre-exist in chaos, 4) that the possibilities for form exist within the Jewel of Judgment, 5) that man is one of the devices for implementing form (in this case, it is first Dworkin and then Corwin), and 6) that the oscillation between the two forces is a universal constant.

As far as man himself is concerned, the novels show that he reflects form and chaos because they are part of his basic nature and that he may bring form from chaos by means of will and discipline.

In another statement, Dworkin confirms this.

> "I do not know which of your children shed out blood on this spot, if this is what you mean. It was done. Let it go at that. Our darker natures come forth strongly in them. It must be that they are too close to the chaos from which we sprang, growing without the exercises of will we endured in defeating it. I had thought that the ritual of traveling the Pattern might suffice for them. I can think of nothing stronger. Yet it failed. They strike out against everything. They seek to destroy the Pattern itself" (*Oberon*, 64).

When Corwin creates a parallel universe by inscribing a new primal Pattern, the task is significantly taxing to him, drawing upon all of his will power, all of his discipline, and leaving, him so exhausted when the act is completed that Brand can simply

walk up to him and take the Jewel of Judgment from him. This is as it should be.

But it must be remembered that Corwin's life, from the moment he woke up on the shadow-Earth until the inscription has been an exercise designed by his father, Oberon, to prepare him for the Kingship of Amber. Though he eventually decides against it, the mental toughness he developed is that which he needs to inscribe the new Pattern.

Corwin does change in the course of the novels. One of the things he must learn on his journey to maturity is the dual nature of man and how to deal with it. That he successfully accomplishes this task is revealed in a comment he makes on his way to Chaos to deliver the Jewel before the final storm destroys everything. He has encountered a strange girl, very similar to the fairy of "La Belle Dame Sans Merci," who tries to delay him by enchantment. Recognizing and then reflecting on her nature, he compares her to yet another strange enchantress he met earlier when he left Avalon.

> Yet, I thought of the woman-thing which had trapped me on the black road as I was leaving Avalon. I had gone at first to aid her, succumbed quickly to her unnatural charms—then, when her mask was removed, saw that there was nothing at all behind it... Still, I have met people who have impressed me favorably at first, people whom I came to hate when I learned what they were like underneath. And sometimes they were like that woman-thing-with nothing really much there. I have found that the mask is often far more acceptable than the alternative. So... this girl I held to me might really be a monster inside. Probably was. Aren't most of us? I could think of worse ways to go if I wanted to give up at this point. I liked her (*Chaos*, 84).

There are, of course, more graphic examples of the monster characteristics in man scattered throughout-the novels. Dara and Dworkin both reveal their darker natures.

In a scene near the end of *The Guns of Avalon*, Corwin is shocked at Dara's appearance. He has caught up with her just as she is completing her first tracing of the Pattern. He describes his reaction.

> Yes, it was Dara! Tall and magnificent now. Both beautiful and somehow horrible at the same time. The sight of her tore at the fabric of my mind. Her arms were raised in exultation and an inhuman laughter flowed from her lips. I wanted to look away, yet I could not move. Had I truly held, caressed, made love to—*that*? I was mightily repelled and simultaneously attracted as I had never been before. I could not understand this overwhelming ambivalence (*Avalon*, 179).

Evil is eventually defeated and good triumphs. In the process, Corwin learns that form and chaos must exist forever in a "living" universe. It is inevitable if the patterns which create universes are spun from the personalities of beings who themselves reflect these powers.

Merlin's Story: The 2nd Chronicle of Amber

Merlin's Story, told in *Trumps of Doom*, *Blood of Amber*, *Sign of Chaos*, *Knight of Shadows*, and *Prince of Chaos*, nicely fills in and amplifies the basic concepts of the form and chaos philosophy, but, more importantly, it also adds to them. In particular, this chronicle seems concerned with the nature of reality and what lies beyond reason and logic.

The last half of the chronicle, in particular, seem invested with new energy, new energy, new ideas, new inspiration, and the plot of the story twists and turns like a hanged man in a hurricane.

One of the most important things that Zelazny does to fill out the form and chaos philosophy is to provide a more complete picture of Chaos. Imaging Chaos is not only necessary to complete the metaphoric requirements of the chronicles but also to show that the forces are in balance. It is also a way to expose certain features of Chaos. We learn, for example, that shadow is easily penetrated here, that shadows are like fragile curtains. We also learn that the stuff of shadow is docile and can be stitched together by a master technician, called a shadowmaster, who makes ways.

Zelazny masterfully images Chaos for us. It is a place of darkness, pits, and shapeshifting, a place of silver, gray, red, and white, a place of black block and glassy, polished needles, a place of rough amphitheaters, plazas, and mazes, a place of candlelight and other fires. It has an order of its own, an order that is familiar, because the place itself is bound to some degree by the human needs of its inhabitants, and yet alien. There is a certain logic to it, and yet there is the suggestion that violence and irrationality lurk just beneath its polished exterior.

The Taoist and Buddhist Golden Means invoke the principle of applying the right action in the right degree in the right direction at the right time to any situation. There is neither too much nor too little. And that is what Zelazny gives us here. In an absolutely brilliant move, he chooses to give the physical picture of Chaos by suggestion, by implication, by innuendo. A few vivid details are allowed to create their own melodies in our imaginations. Metaphorically, Chaos is the dark side of our own personalities, the Hyde to our Dr. Jekyll. And Merlin is a metaphor for that concept of humanity. He is a person of order *and* chaos, both angel and beast. Not by accident, he expresses his own sense of alienation about midway through *Prince of Chaos*. By being literally from both places, he is not completely part of either. Therefore, his point of view is not

And in the scene near the beginning of *The Hand of Oberon* where Dworkin mistakes Corwin for Oberon, the conversation breaks off when the mad artist suddenly starts to revert to something from Chaos, "...his features began to flow like melting wax and he somehow seemed larger and longer-limbed than he had been" (*Oberon*, 68).

The monster exists in all of us, of course, and when Corwin recognizes it in himself he truly begins to achieve maturity. Such self-awareness is displayed in *The Courts of Chaos*. Two comments will illustrate. The first is made to Oberon when Corwin turns down his father's offer of the throne. "My own hands are not clean," he says. The second is made to his sister, Fiona, as Corwin lies exhausted on the battlefield waiting to see if Random can stem the oncoming storm with the Jewel of Judgment. "I have tricked people and I have killed them. I have calculated and I have lost."

In Zelazny's work, in general, people change dramatically under the impact of their experience. This is exactly what happens to Corwin, and in the process of maturation, he learns many valuable lessons about human nature. One of them is that good and evil are not nearly as neatly defined as he would have them be and that the basic nature of man is ambiguous. He also learns that good and evil are not synonymous with form and chaos.

To the contrary, Zelazny is very careful to separate one set of ideas from the other by the symbolism of the novels. An examination of two major symbol clusters will clarify the point. The first, representing good, is attached to the unicorn, which is itself identified strongly with Christ. The second, representing evil, is attached to Brand and the devil. There is overwhelming evidence in the novels to support these interpretations.

Without discussing the extensive and complicated evolution of the unicorn symbol, it is sufficient to say that it finally came to be associated with Christ and good (Shepard, 81). That Zelazny intends for the unicorn to be used in its extrinsic sense is indicated by the fact that he uses that description of it which became associated with Christianity: a pure white animal, slightly smaller than a horse, with goat's beard, cloven hooves, and spiraled horn (Shepard, 71).

Moreover, there is other evidence to support the contention that Amber's unicorn symbolizes good and, at least vaguely, suggests Christ. Two of the primary characteristics of the unicorn symbolizing Christ, water-conning and snake-eating, define its role in battling evil. Water-conning is the characteristic of dipping its horn into poisoned water to detoxify it so that other animals may drink. Its penchant for eating snakes certainly implies a role in battling evil since snakes are traditional Christian symbols for the devil. The good versus evil relationship is further supported by the traditional graphics of the "Wheel of Fortune" Tarot card, one of several Major

completely either. He is psychologically disenfranchised. Merlin's dark side can emerge, like Jekyll's, by the simple act of shapeshifting. The inhabitants flow easily between their human and demon forms—much like humans flow between their various, polarized emotional states, but such shifting does not imply necessarily that they have also become evil.

One of the innovations to his theories comes when Zelazny reveals that both the Logrus and the various manifestations of the Pattern possess a kind of consciousness. It is clear that consciousness in these devices are more than simple passive awareness. The broken pattern in *Knight of Shadows*, for example, orchestrates its own repair by using Coral as bait to get Merlin to walk it. It then forces him to make love to her before it will permit them to leave its center, as if the act of love itself were an additional means of helping it heal. Also, when Merlin is trapped in the Land Between Shadow, he gets a message from Logrus through Frakir (which bears a likeness to the Thread in Zelazny's "Kalifriki" stories), more or less to the effect that he should not call it again, or the Pattern, because of the difficulty for either of them to manifest there and because the land distorts energy and might therefore be dangerous to Merlin.

The Land Between Shadows is, of course, another level of reality and another innovation to the philosophy. Merlin encounters it when he is transported there to participate in a quest set up by the Unicorn of Order and the Serpent of Chaos. This is a place unfriendly to the Logrus and the Pattern, so they use the Unicorn and Serpent as agents to carry out their various encounters. The Land is a place where little ever changes, which is difficult to access, which distorts energy, and which produces facsimiles of people who have walked the Pattern or the Logrus that are called ghosts. It is a place that is difficult to explain in terms of logic and reason, perhaps somewhat like our own sub-atomic universe in that respect.

This place, "the underside of reality" as Frakir calls it, is also where Merlin acquires the Jewel of Judgment, and it represents yet another order of reality. Older than the Pattern in Amber, and used to construct it, the Jewel contains yet another pattern within it. Merlin enters this pattern mentally, or perhaps his essence enters it. In any case, he "walks" it and inscribes within himself a "recording of a higher power" which will protect him from compromise by Amber's Pattern, and presumably from the Logrus, which are vying for his absolute commitment. Merlin describes the inscription as he is navigating the equivalent of the veils within the Jewel: "A message was being inscribed upon my spirit. In the beginning was a word I cannot spell..." (*Knight*, 177). Similarity to the first words of Genesis, usually translated as "In the beginning was the word," is not accidental. This allusion, I believe, not only implies

that is there some ultimate beginning or force beyond the Jewel but that Merlin has received a message from *It*. Though far removed from us and from the characters of the novels, this would be yet another level of existence, a "First Cause" of sorts (or God), that creates and holds the matter from which we get the "Big Bang", that which defines the nature and laws of Amber's universe, permits form and chaos to exist, and which defines their natures and the nature of their relationship. In other words, it not only defines what they are but establishes opposites and that there is a tension between them, or a balance. From their tension, all other things apparently spring. (Zelazny is faced here, of course, with an ultimate writer's paradox, the same kind of paradox that has defeated writers who tried to create truly alien aliens. He must suggest a place that is different in logic from our own, and yet he is bound by human limitation. Though the place must seem different, it cannot ever really violate the collective boundaries of human logic if it is to be understood by a large number of readers.)

Merlin's conclusions about the nature of reality confirm most of this.

> I was falling... I'd a hunch that I'd just about bought the farm and that I was about to die without opportunity to reveal my insight into the nature of reality: The Pattern did not care about the children of Amber any more than the Logrus did about those of the Courts of Chaos. The powers care, perhaps, about themselves, about each other, about heavy cosmic principles, about the Unicorn and the Serpent, of which they were very probably but geometric manifestations. They did not care about me, about Coral, about Mandor, probably not even about Oberon or Dworkin himself.We were totally insignificant or at most tools or sometimes annoyances, to be employed or destroyed as the occasion warranted... (*Knight*, 199-200).

What then is the ultimate answer, the ultimate reality? Zelazny knows quite well what Aristotle knew that there is a reality beyond human logic and reason. He takes his readers as far as human logic and reason permit. Even in his Chaos there is form—different perhaps than out own, but form nonetheless. Zelazny gives us a hint of what might lay beyond both Amber's universe and our own when Merlin, standing outside the doors of frozen flame at the Great Cathedral of the Serpent at the Plaza at the End of the World which sits on the Rim of the Pit, says that on a good day one can see the beginning, or the end, of the universe, and watches stars swarm through space that "folded and unfolded like the petals of a flower" (*Prince*, 150). This line, dropped rather inauspiciously, recalls the end of *The Changing Land* where the house spins through the end of time and then loops back through its

completely either. He is psychologically disenfranchised. Merlin's dark side can emerge, like Jekyll's, by the simple act of shapeshifting. The inhabitants flow easily between their human and demon forms—much like humans flow between their various, polarized emotional states, but such shifting does not imply necessarily that they have also become evil.

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beginning, suggesting that there may be an endless cycle of destructions and creations. And perhaps in those new creations different orders of logic and reason will prevail, logic and reason beyond what any of us can possibly imagine.

Philosophically, Merlin's Story is about the limits of reason as opposed to other ways of knowing. Reality in the world of these novels proves to be a very complicated concept. Amber's universe not only encompasses our own real one but also is quite permissive, allowing such things as spells, ghosts, demons, shapeshifting, and almost anything else that can be imagined. Amber's universe is ultimately much, much larger than our own.

But inevitably, Merlin's Story is more than a treatise on reality, or even form and chaos. It is rather about growth and renewal. Merlin must grow in a way that is mentally healthy. His is the making not only of a sorcerer (like his namesake) but of a King. He is rather unique in his own universe, a person with an inheritance from both form and chaos. He must learn, as we must all learn in our own worlds, to balance his light and dark sides. He is a symbol for own psychological maturation, and in that sense, like most of Zelazny's stories, his is a quest for psychological wholeness, a quest for significance and purpose in life.

Sam's Story: *Lord of Light*

Lord of Light, probably Zelazny's best novel to date and winner of the 1968 "Hugo", also reflects the form and chaos doctrine in its philosophical structure. Moreover, its Buddhist and Hindu source materials proved to be highly analogous.

In the historical relationship between Hinduism and Buddhism, Zelazny found an excellent metaphor for the dynamic relationship between form and chaos. The parallels between the two are unmistakable. Buddha found the Hindu system to be static and corrupt, weighed down by meaningless and dead ritual, insensitive to the common man, and too complex to be understood by him (Politella, 66). Sam, the novel's hero, found deicratism the same. Buddha's mission on Earth was to re-form an old religion, not to start a new one (Politella, 67).

Sam's mission in the novel is identical, to re-form deicratism by means of accelerationism. Both Buddha and Sam become instruments of change. Hinduism becomes the model for deicratism, and Buddhism for accelerationism. Thus, philosophically, *Lord of Light* is broadly structured by the relationship between the two great religions and the form and chaos doctrine.

In the dynamics of form and chaos, systems, which are structured and therefore forms, tend to become more rigid and complex as they age. They also tend

to increase in inertia and restriction. Eventually this process reaches a point where the forces of form and of chaos are nearly in balance, or a near-stasis has been created. The rate of change is practically zero.

The effects on a culture and individuals in it are devastating. Intelligent beings can become neurotic, even psychotic, under these conditions. And so can the society.

As the system is warped farther and farther from the natural rhythm of the universe, intelligent beings intuitively sense it (some more than others of course) and move to rectify the situation. Intelligent beings then become instruments of chaos by attempting to destroy the nearly static system or by drastically modifying it to bring it into phase.

In *Lord of Light*, this is exactly the situation with deicratism, a religious system. It has become so encumbered with rules, rituals, gods, and ceremonies that it has become unresponsive to the common man. It must therefore be destroyed or drastically changed. Sam senses this and moves to accomplish it.

In the Hindu "Trimurti," Zelazny found an even more specific metaphor for the relationship between form and chaos. Because it is couched in human terms, its adaptation to the novel was easy. The traditional understanding of the meaning of the three gods was perfect. Brahma represents the creative force of the universe, Siva the destructive, and Vishnu preserves the conditions of the universe so that the other two forces can interact. Brahma and Siva are drawn from Vishnu, and the other gods of the Indian pantheon are drawn from the three. Vishnu, himself, came from the Absolute (Grimal, 211). In short, the "Trimurti" sets the form-making and form-destroying functions against one another while ensuring that the conditions for their interaction are maintained.

Zelazny follows this general pattern in the development of *Lord of Light*, even though he makes no attempt to duplicate the traditional mythology attached to the "Trimuti" gods. He lets the story run its course within the limitations and possibilities he has posed in the world of the novel. Body shifting, for example, permits different individuals to assume a particular god's identity. Two different people, first Madeline and then Kali, function as Brahma, for instance, during the duration of the story. Regardless of the shifting identities, someone always functions as form-maker, or creator, while someone else functions as form-destroyer up to the very end of the novel.

It is no coincidence that at that point Brahma and Siva (traditional creator and destroyer respectively) are themselves destroyed and that Vishnu (the traditional preserver) rules in heaven. These facts symbolize the end of the current age, or *yuga*, and the beginning of a new creation. Other story data supports this interpretation. Sam appears, for example, just prior to the battle of Khaipur (the final battle

of the novel) riding a white horse. He has been previously known as Lord Kalkin, and he has been identified at the beginning of section vii with "Maitreya, Lord of Light."

Hinduism specifies that the end of the current age, the *Kali Yuga*, will be signaled by the appearance of the god Kalki, the tenth avatar of Vishnu, riding a white horse and wielding a sword that will blaze like a comet to create, renew, and restore purity to the Earth (Politella, 29-30). In Buddhism, Maitreya is the Buddha of the Future. He will save mankind through his love by bringing each individual to a state of illumination, in the sense of self-realization (Evans-Wentz, 108). The parallels are unmistakable.

The character of Sam is also the product of the form and chaos doctrine. Like all of Zelazny's major characters, and man-in-general, Sam reflects both functions. In one of his early identities, he is Lord Kalkin, binder of energy and form-maker. He, and others of the First, create a new earthlike civilization on Urath by tearing control of it from its native inhabitants. Ironically, but typical of Zelazny's view of man, Sam is destroying form in the very process of creating it. It is important to remember, however, that form-making is his general function and that the sheer scope of the creations outweighs the destruction.

Later, as Mahasamatman (from which the name Sam is derived by both front and back clipping), he switches general functions. He becomes the unbinder, the liberator, the destroyer of forms, systems, and patterns. He frees the demons he originally bound in Hellwell, he attacks the gods both physically and psychologically, and he destroys the dominant political system and religion.

Even guilt is attributable to the form and chaos doctrine. In a moving scene from the novel, Taraka, a demon and once a creature of pure, clear flame, describes his first feelings of guilt.

> My pleasures diminish by the day! Do you know why this is, Siddhartha? [Yet another of Sam's identities.] Can you tell me why strange feelings now come over me, dampening my strongest moments, weakening me and casting me down when I should be elated, when I should be filled with joy? Is *this* the curse of the Buddha? (*Lord*, 161).

Seizing an opportunity when Sam's defenses were down, Taraka had invaded Sam's body, partly as revenge for being bound in Hellwell for several centuries by him and partly to experience those fleshly pleasures which were denied to him otherwise. While in Sam's body, however, Taraka learns about guilt, and in an ironic twist he now finds himself more tightly bound than when he was physically confined. His pure nature has been changed in the symbiotic relationship.

Sam explains what has happened to Taraka:

> ...all men have within them both that which is dark and that which is light. A man is a thing of many divisions, not a pure, clear flame such as you once were. His intellect often wars with his emotions, his will with his desires... his ideals are at odds with his environment, and if he follows them, he knows keenly the loss of that which was old—but if he does not follow them, he feels the pain of having forsaken a new and noble dream. Whatever he does represents both a gain and a loss, an arrival and a departure. Always he mourns that which is gone and fears some part of that which is new. Reason opposes tradition. Emotions oppose the restrictions his fellow men lay upon him. Always, from the friction of these things, there arises the thing you called the curse of man and mocked—guilt (*Lord*, 161-2).

This description is consonant with Zelazny's general picture of man as a creature embodying both form and chaos and usually being out-of-phase with the rhythm created by these two forces. Guilt is the product of the lack of synchronization.

Though the natural rhythm of the universe flows through man, because he is a part of nature, himself, he usually blocks off his awareness of it by fixing on earthly and physical pleasures. He feels the lack of harmony as guilt but remains unconscious of its origin.

Man is not eternally condemned to this state, however. If he were to learn to trust his intuition, he would eventually raise his level of awareness and promote his own growth towards higher and higher levels of consciousness. Finally, he would achieve a state of illumination, which would bring him a complete understanding of the great plan of the universe and of how each piece of human activity fits into it. This is the Buddhist concept of illumination, or enlightenment, and the goal of every individual. With its achievement comes perfect harmony because the soul becomes part of the "Absolute."

This is, in fact, the very trip that Sam makes during the novel.

Because all dichotomies are ultimately traceable to the opposition that exists between form and chaos, it is no surprise to find *Lord of Light* loaded with polar images and symbols. By doing this, Zelazny accomplishes two important objectives: he supports the concept that form and chaos underlie all things, and he metaphorically represents their relationship throughout the novel.

Several examples will illustrate the pervasiveness of this imagery. Perhaps the most obvious antimonies are light and dark, life and death, and creation and destruction. They are represented initially by the opposition of hero to enemy, or Sam to Yama. They eventually become allies, though, to

destroy the static system of deicratism. This is a perfect reflection of the dynamics of form and chaos, which also combine briefly when confronted by stasis.

There is also the polarity of the Celestial City. Created by Vishnu, it is a perfect balance of form and chaos. He designed it so that the metropolitan area would be offset by the wilderness of the Kaniburrah Forrest. Both exist under the same dome.

> While wilderness can exist independent of cities, that which dwells within a city requires more than the tamed plants of a pleasance. If the world were all city, he [Vishnu] had reasoned, the dwellers within it would turn a portion of it into a wilderness, for there is that within them all which desires that somewhere there be an end to order and a beginning to chaos (191).

Another polar image is found in the opposition of Accelerationism and Deicratism, the two political philosophies, systems, and religions of the humans of Urath. The first represents progress, self-development, and discovery. The second, paternal control, ignorance, and exploitation. Sam opposes the later because it has become static and corrupt.

In addition to these polarities, the novel also displays polarities in style and structure. The exotic and sublime of Hinduism and Buddhism, for example, are set against the mechanism and technology of the First. In explaining the abstract concepts of nirvana and reincarnation technologically, Zelazny is highly ingenious.

These are then but a few examples of the polar imagery in *Lord of Light*. They were selected to represent the nature and extent of the imagery and not as an inventory of it. They are extremely appropriate to the novel, not only because of the nature of form and chaos but also because the very basis of Hinduism, and therefore Buddhism, is found in eternal opposition. In explaining the confusion most scholars find in Hindu mythology, J. Herbert writes:

> ...the achievement up to this point is the mobilisation both of the basic eternal principles and of creative, divine will, which governs the forces involved. The subsequent development is that in which dualities-polarities appear...
>
> Once this duality—or rather polarity—of god and the devil in the world appeared, multiplicity proper can manifest itself—not as yet the multiplicity of objects, beings, and individualized movements, but that of secondary principles that will enable the rest to come to life (Grimal, 210).

In addition to the stories discussed here, the form and chaos philosophy is prominent in many of Zelazny's early works. *This*

Immortal, *The Dream Master*, *Creatures of Light and Darkness*, and *Jack of Shadows*, show heavy indebtedness to it. In others, it may not be so obvious. Whether it is or not, the form and chaos doctrine is fundamental to Zelazny's thinking and therefore instrumental in shaping his fiction.

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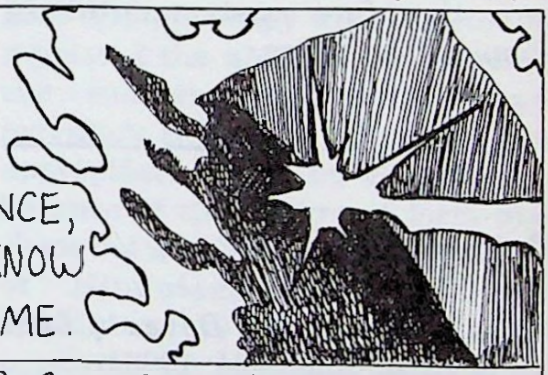
SHADOWKNIGHT

K92

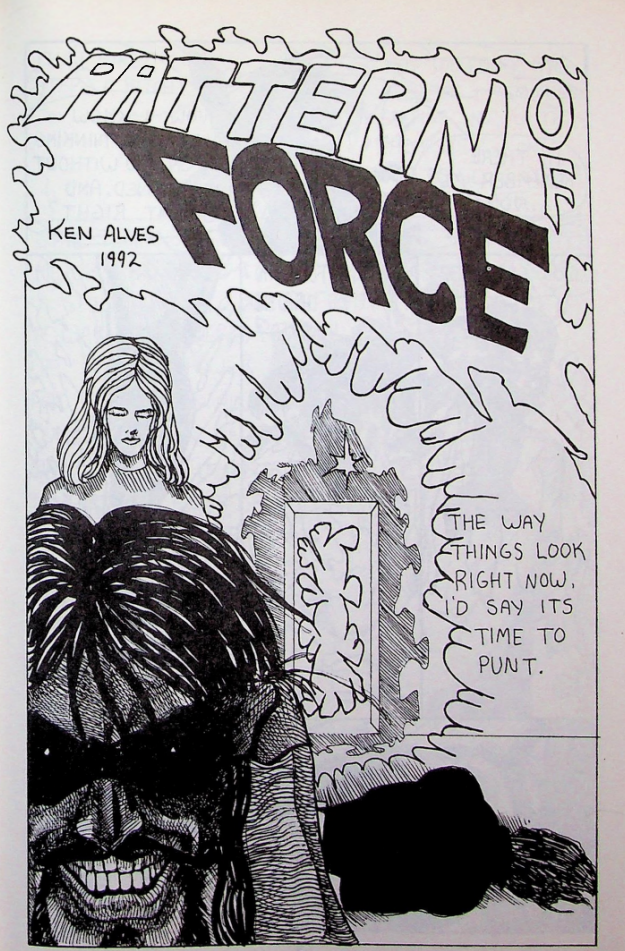
I AM CALLED DARKVEIL. I AM AN INTELLIGENT CLOAK AND PART OF A PRIMAL FORCE OF DARKNESS. IN ESSENCE, I AM A TALKING BLANKET. I KNOW IT SOUNDS STUPID. BEAR WITH ME.



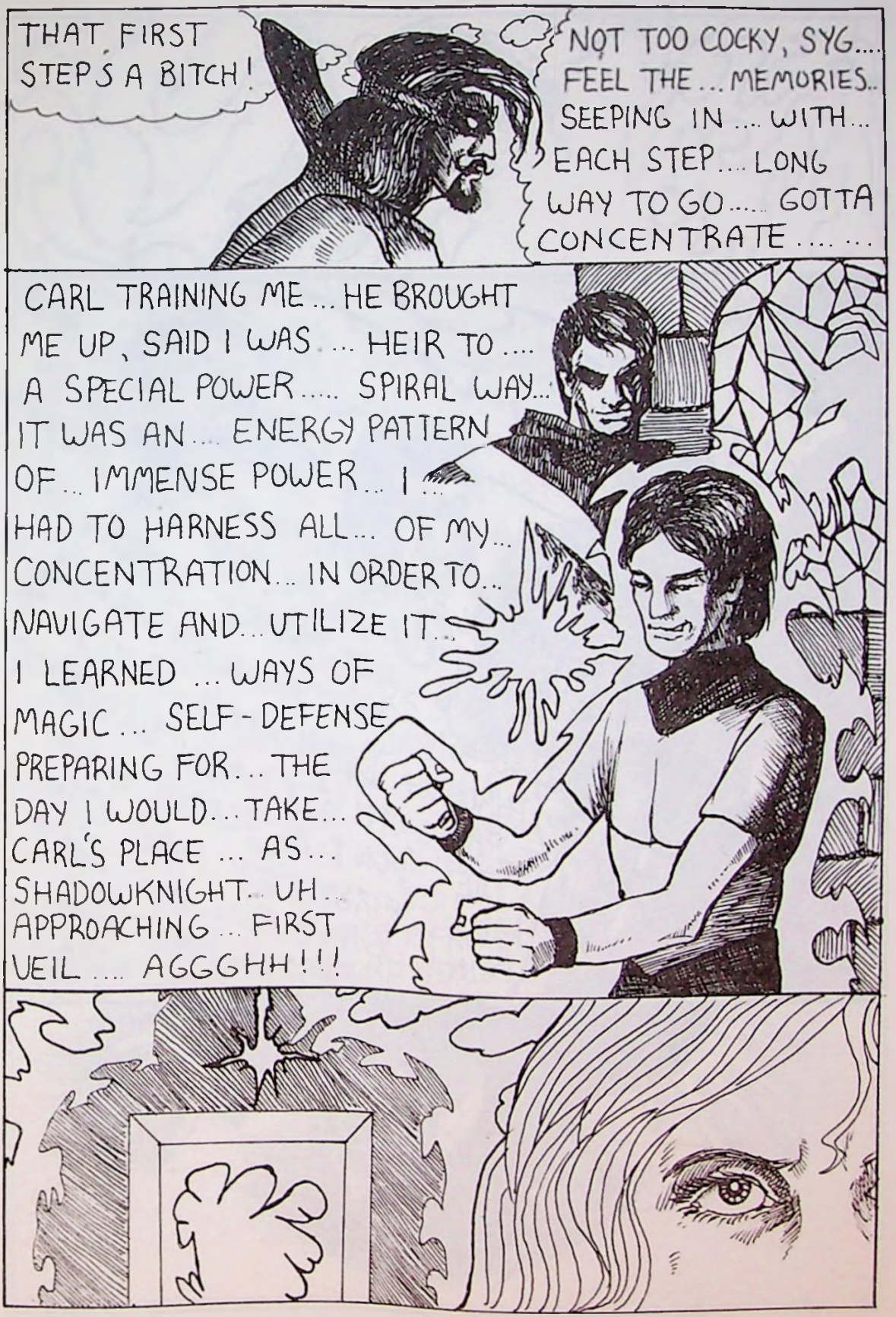
MY OWNER AND FRIEND, MORGAN AMBERSON, A.K.A. SHADOWKNIGHT. A SOMETIME SUPER HERO, SOMETIME MAGICIAN, SOMETIME SUCKER. HE WAS ABOUT TO INITIATE A PATTERN WALK TO TRY AND JOG SOME OF HIS MEMORIES WHEN HE WAS COLD-COCKED BY...

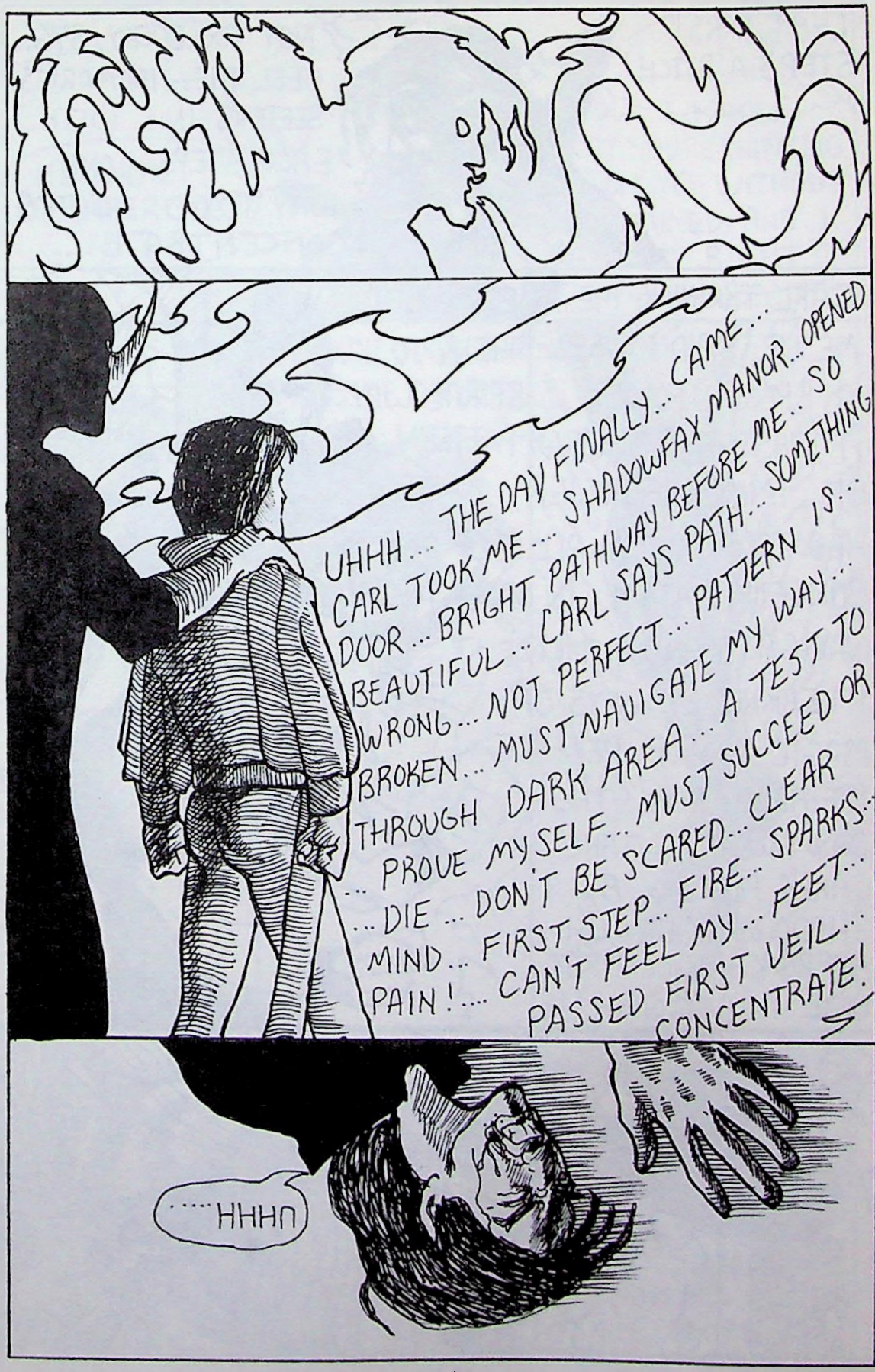
THIS MAN. SYGIL. HE HAS SOMEHOW BREACHED THE DEFENSES OF SHADOWFAX MANOR. HE APPARENTLY HAS A GRUDGE AGAINST MORGAN, AND IS ABOUT TO DO SOMETHING HURTFUL TO OUR FABRIC OF REALITY. HE IS ALSO MORGAN'S "BROTHER."

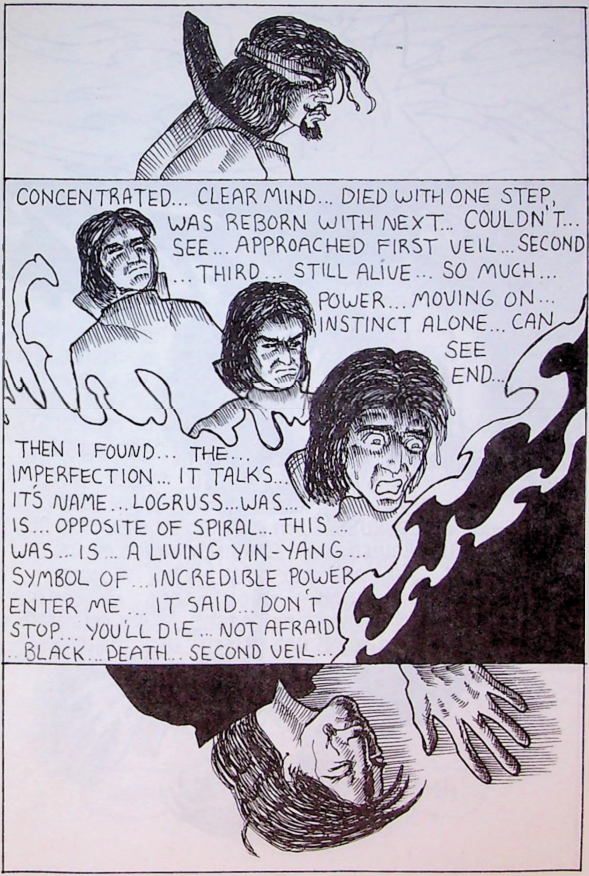
THE WOMAN WE DEFEATED ON EARTH. SHE APPEARS TO BE A PAWN OF SYGIL'S. I STILL HAVE NO IDEA WHO SHE IS. SO SUE ME.


PATTERN OF FORCE
KEN ALVES
1992
THE WAY THINGS LOOK RIGHT NOW, I'D SAY ITS TIME TO PUNT.

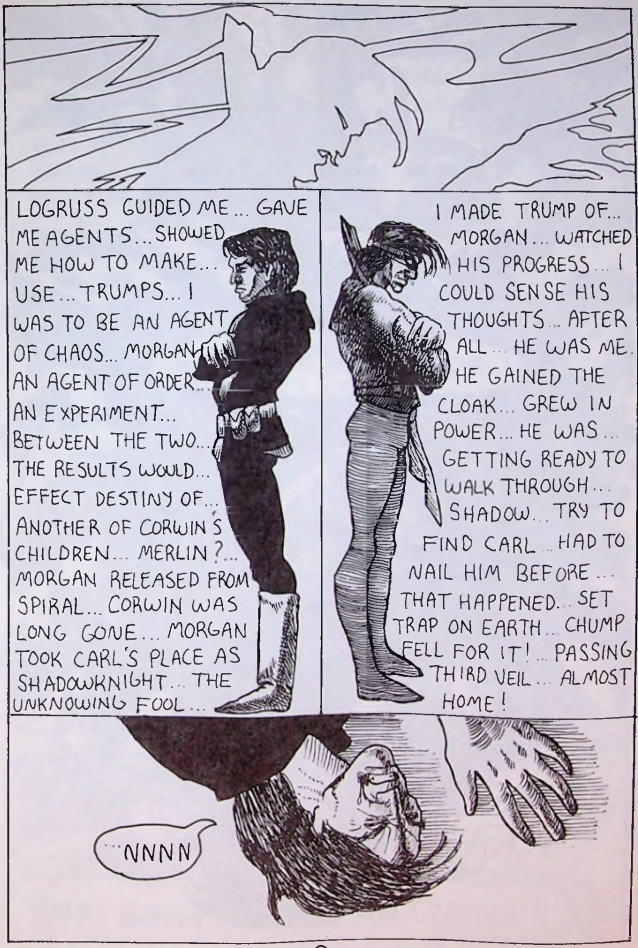
HI THERE. REMEMBER ME? ...NO?
NOW, I KNOW WHAT YOU'RE THINKING. I STEP ON YOU WITHOUT BEING ATTUNED, AND I BITE IT. RIGHT?
NOW LETS SEE...
PUT ONE FOOT IN FRONT OF THE OTHER
AND SOON YOU'LL BE WANTING SO MUCH MORE!!!

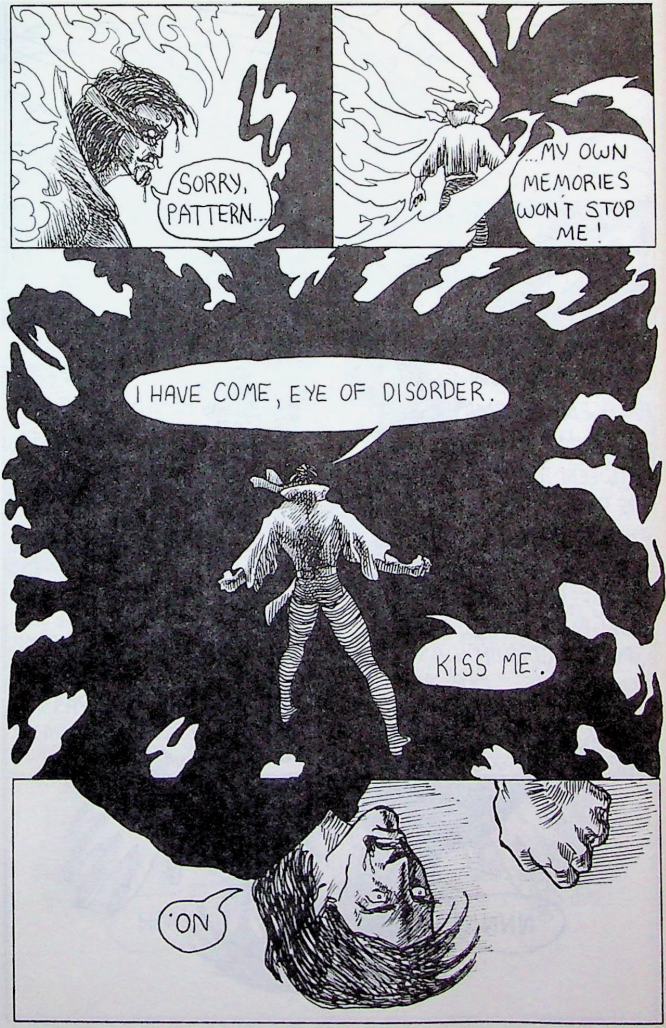

THAT FIRST STEP'S A BITCH!
NOT TOO COCKY, SYG.... FEEL THE... MEMORIES.. SEEPING IN.... WITH... EACH STEP.... LONG WAY TO GO..... GOTTA CONCENTRATE.... ...
CARL TRAINING ME... HE BROUGHT ME UP, SAID I WAS... HEIR TO.... A SPECIAL POWER..... SPIRAL WAY... IT WAS AN.... ENERGY PATTERN OF... IMMENSE POWER... I... HAD TO HARNESS ALL... OF MY... CONCENTRATION... IN ORDER TO... NAVIGATE AND... UTILIZE IT... I LEARNED ... WAYS OF MAGIC... SELF-DEFENSE PREPARING FOR... THE DAY I WOULD... TAKE... CARL'S PLACE ... AS... SHADOWKNIGHT... UH... APPROACHING... FIRST VEIL.... AGGGHH!!!


UHHH... THE DAY FINALLY... CAME...
CARL TOOK ME... SHADOWFAX MANOR... OPENED
DOOR... BRIGHT PATHWAY BEFORE ME... SO
BEAUTIFUL... CARL SAYS PATH... SOMETHING
WRONG... NOT PERFECT... PATTERN IS...
BROKEN... MUST NAVIGATE MY WAY...
THROUGH DARK AREA... A TEST TO
... PROVE MYSELF... MUST SUCCEED OR
...DIE... DON'T BE SCARED... CLEAR
MIND... FIRST STEP... FIRE... SPARKS...
PAIN!... CAN'T FEEL MY... FEET...
PASSED FIRST VEIL...
CONCENTRATE!
.....HHHN

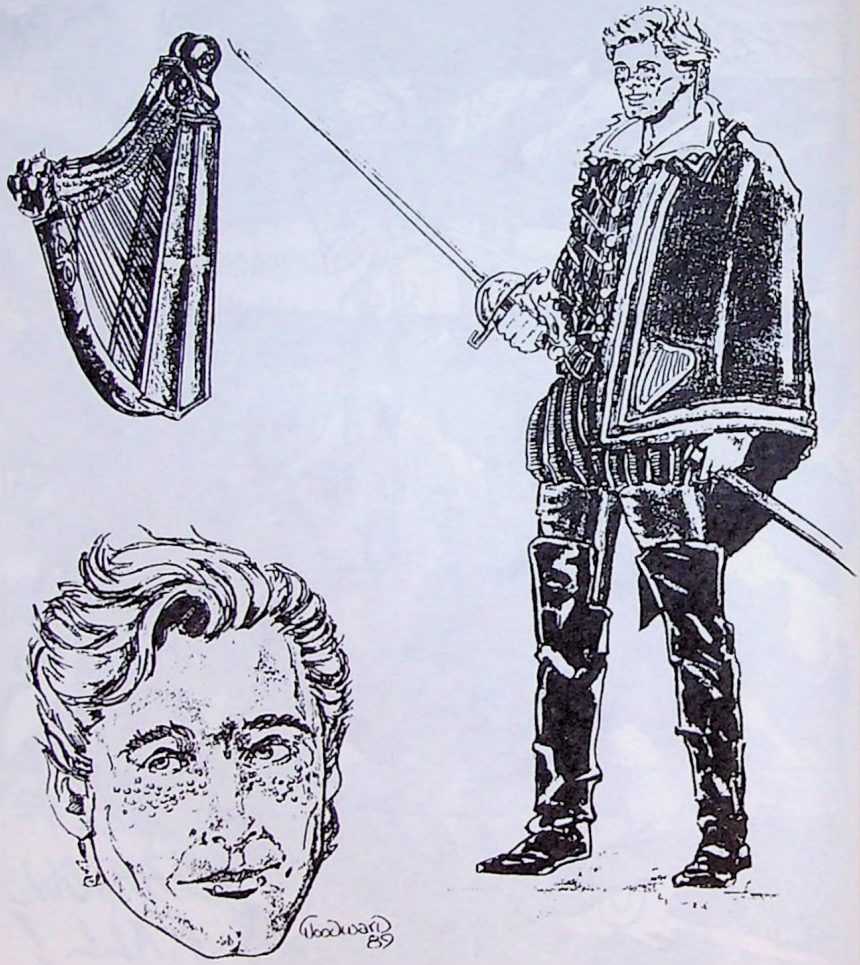

CONCENTRATED... CLEAR MIND... DIED WITH ONE STEP, WAS REBORN WITH NEXT... COULDN'T... SEE... APPROACHED FIRST VEIL... SECOND ... THIRD... STILL ALIVE... SO MUCH... POWER... MOVING ON... INSTINCT ALONE... CAN SEE END...
THEN I FOUND... THE... IMPERFECTION... IT TALKS... ITS NAME... LOGRUSS... WAS... IS... OPPOSITE OF SPIRAL... THIS... WAS... IS... A LIVING YIN-YANG... SYMBOL OF... INCREDIBLE POWER ENTER ME... IT SAID... DON'T STOP... YOU'LL DIE... NOT AFRAID BLACK... DEATH... SECOND VEIL...

LOGRUSS... PULLS ME INSIDE... FILLS ME WITH IT'S... POWER... PART OF ME RESISTS... PART DOESN'T... FEEL MYSELF... SPLITTING APART... DAMN... PAIN... I AM... CHILD OF LOGRUSS... SON OF CHAOS... ALSO SON OF... AMBER... CARL TRAINED ME... CORWIN TRAINED ME IN... PATTERN USE... NOW MY CHAOS HALF - SYGIL... WOULD... LEARN LOGRUSS... MORGAN'S MIND CHANGED... NO MEMORY OF ME EVER INSIDE HIM... TIME PASSES... I AM RELEASED BEFORE MORGAN... 20 YEARS HAD PASSED... UGH... THIRD VEIL...
...HNN


LOGRUSS GUIDED ME... GAVE ME AGENTS... SHOWED ME HOW TO MAKE... USE... TRUMPS... I WAS TO BE AN AGENT OF CHAOS... MORGAN AN AGENT OF ORDER... AN EXPERIMENT... BETWEEN THE TWO... THE RESULTS WOULD... EFFECT DESTINY OF... ANOTHER OF CORWIN'S CHILDREN... MERLIN?... MORGAN RELEASED FROM SPIRAL... CORWIN WAS LONG GONE... MORGAN TOOK CARL'S PLACE AS SHADOWKNIGHT... THE UNKNOWING FOOL...
I MADE TRUMP OF... MORGAN... WATCHED HIS PROGRESS... I COULD SENSE HIS THOUGHTS... AFTER ALL... HE WAS ME. HE GAINED THE CLOAK... GREW IN POWER... HE WAS... GETTING READY TO WALK THROUGH... SHADOW... TRY TO FIND CARL... HAD TO NAIL HIM BEFORE... THAT HAPPENED... SET TRAP ON EARTH... CHUMP FELL FOR IT!... PASSING THIRD VEIL... ALMOST HOME!
...NNNN


SORRY, PATTERN...
...MY OWN MEMORIES WON'T STOP ME!
I HAVE COME, EYE OF DISORDER.
KISS ME.
'ON

WHAT THE HELL IS HE DOING!?!
ENDING YOUR WORLD.
MMM HMMM! A REAL NICE LITTLE POWER YOU HAVE HERE, MORGAN. TOO BAD YOU COULDN'T HAVE REALIZED THE POSSIBILITIES A TAD BIT SOONER! 'CAUSE NOW....
NEXT: SHADOWS FALL!
YOU'RE GONNA BE HURTIN' FOR CERTAIN!!!!
JK92



·Carolan·

Carolan's Diary

by Don Woodward

(An Amber Diary, Based on a Campaign by Erick Wujcik)

"Other things may change us, but we start and end with family."

—Anthony Brandt

It occurs to me that in my haste to complete this story before the coming dawn I have neglected to tell you who I am. It might help you understand all the hows and whyfores if I had a name, eh? 'Tis Carolan. It means champion in the language of my maternal grandfather and I was always proud of it, until two days ago.

I used to be Carolan of Amber, heir to the throne of the Eternal City. Now I'm just Carolan, condemned killer.

In some cultures people believe that names have magical powers and attach great significance to them, but that's mostly crap. Names are just combinations of letters that represent sounds. Knowing a person's true name is worthless unless you also understand who they are, and one of the only ways I know of achieving such an understanding is to examine a person's background.

I know, I know, you're thinking, 'Jesus, rehashing his adult life was bad enough but his childhood too?'

Hey, I think I made it clear at the outset that this entire exercise was never for your benefit in the first place. Look, if you don't give a shit about understanding who I am then just skip ahead, okay!

My life started out happy enough. Not at all what you would expect from a future murderer. We weren't poor, my parents didn't abuse me, and my Dad was even around most of the time.

I was born in Texorami. My mother sang the blues and my father was... my father.

Throughout my childhood I never saw my father work for a living. Unless you count drumming or gambling as work; but neither my mother or I ever lacked for creature comforts and in Texorami the life-style my Dad choose to lead was not that unusual, he was just better at it than most.

My mother is Maureen Constància Maire Estevéz. She is the daughter of an Ivernian ship captain and a Caribe woman who waited on tables in a seaman's hangout.

The Caribe's are the native inhabitants of the islands that dot the Sea of Courage that lies just beyond Texorami's gulf and divides the two great continents of the New World. They are a mixed race formed from escaped Afrikaen slaves, the early Castellani settlers of the area, and the native Indians, excuse me I mean, indigenous peoples.

My grandmother Cecilia Estevéz was a typical Caribe woman, she was small, both of stature and build, with a dark bronze, almost brown, complexion, wiry raven tresses, flashing black eyes, and a fiery Castellani temper. She was very beautiful and just a touch exotic, especially by Old World standards.

Her uncle Juan owned a waterfront cantina that specialized in serving hot spicy meals, fresh fruit dishes, and a local brew called Texacala to sailors used to months of ship's stores. It was while she was working in the cantina that Cecilia met my grandfather Seosamh O'Reachtaire. In Thari we would call him Joe O'Raftery.

Joe O'Raftery was a hard headed north Ivernian Gael, in Shadow Earth terminology, an Irishmen from Ulster. He was a large man with rough honed features, flaming red hair, deep green eyes, and a Gaelic temper. He was something of a reactionary who clung to skippering wind vessels long after they had become uneconomical.

To me my grandfather will always be, 'Captain Joe,' he was not much different then, from the way I remembered him later, a simple man with simple tastes. He disliked Texacala and hated the hot spicy Caribe dishes so popular in Texorami. But he loved fresh fruit, especially after a long rough crossing of the ocean. It was Uncle Juan's famous fruit dishes that brought him to the cantina. There are some who say that Uncle Juan's spiced apples are the best in Texorami, if not the world, and Captain Joe loved spiced apples best of all. It was a dish of those delicious apples, hot from the oven and accidentally dumped in Captain Joe's lap by my grandmother that brought her into his life.

That first meeting was hardly what you could call love at first sight. Bloody Hell, you could hardly call it love at all! A classic clash between Gaelic and Castellani tempers it was, more accurately, a donnybrook and a Bloody wild one at that. The punching, scratching, and screaming ended, however, in intense passion and a week of the best sex that either of them had ever experienced.

When it was over, Cecilia, who at seventeen was no starry-eyed virgin, never expected to see her 'Captain' again. She went back to work in the cantina and vowed to forget about the 'Big Mick.' She was wrong though. Captain Joe, who was over ten years her senior, was unable to get her out of his mind. She was different than any woman he had ever known and he felt drawn to her like a moth to a flame. Each time he was in Texorami he came back to Cecilia and each time he came back they fought and had great sex. They were bound to one another by passion and physical desire but love had little to do with their relationship until my mother was born.

The last of their classic brawls was over my mother's name. Captain Joe wanted the baby to have his name but since they weren't married my grandmother insisted that it wouldn't be right. Besides she always claimed his last name was unpronounceable. They compromised on two Gaelic names and two Castellani ones. It was their first battle that wasn't decided in the bedroom and the first of many compromises to come.

Mom was a beautiful baby, who became a pretty little girl. As she grew so did her parent's love for one another. My grandparents eventually discovered they had something in common besides a desire for passionate sex and though the fire never left their relationship, there was now sharing and love as well. They would never marry, however. Though he never mentioned one, even to me, I always suspected it was because Captain Joe already had a wife and family back in Ivernia.

Captain Joe doted on my mother. According to Grandma, Mom could get away with anything whenever 'Captain Daddy' was in port. From the way he spoiled her I've always believed that Mom must have been Captain Joe's youngest child, as well as his only daughter. Even when she grew older he couldn't say no to her. He couldn't keep her from becoming a torch singer and he couldn't stop her from loving my father.

But it wasn't just Captain Joe who couldn't say no. Dad has always had the same problem, as did I when I got older. 'Tis Bloody difficult to say no to my mother. Even Honey Bear couldn't do it. The only one of us Mom couldn't manipulate was Grandma.

I know I'm hardly an unbiased observer, but the only woman I know who is more beautiful than my mother is my Aunt Florimel, and that includes my Aunt Fiona on whom I've had a crush since I was ten. When she met my father my mother was eighteen and a half years old, tall (5' 8"), small busted, and already had the longest best-looking pair of legs anywhere in Shadow. Her tawny brown complexion is the color of coffee with heavy cream. She has curly waist length raven hair, big almond-shaped deep green eyes, and the most beautiful voice you'll ever hear.

Today my mother's body is a bit rounder and softer than when she was a girl. Her breasts are fuller since my birth and her raven locks have a touch of gray at the temples. But if anything I'd guess she is even more beautiful as a woman than as a girl. At least that's what my Dad claims.

Mom is eighty now, though she looks and feels like someone in their middle to late twenties. I have often wondered if mom's youth was:

A) an after-effect of my birth;
B) an indirect result of Trump use;
C) induced by some Pattern Magic;
D) all of the above;
E) none of the above, or;
F) something else, maybe the Logrus.

Chances are I'll never get to find out now.

Except for some possible adultery this is all pretty average stuff, eh? Like I said I had a pretty normal childhood. I loved both my parents and they loved me.

Hell, my father was my best friend, by the time I was a teenager it was almost like we were the same age. Until he left to be King my dad was more like my big brother than my father, we were co-conspirators and best buddies. Most kids had to sneak off and learn about vices and such behind their parents backs, not me. Since it was my Dad who introduced me to most of the vices Texorami has to offer, sneaking was never necessary.

My Mom was pretty lenient too, although she had this way of making you think the things she wanted you to do were really your own idea. My authority figures were my grandparents but I loved both of them too. Hell, I worshipped the ground Captain Joe walked on for as long as he lived. I even picked up his speech patterns despite my Dad's constant complaints and harassment about my 'ploughboy accent'. If Dad had wanted me to speak proper Thari so badly then he shouldn't have waited until I could already speak three other languages to teach me.

But I imagine most of this must be Bloody well boring to anyone but me. So I guess you don't want to hear about how I was born, learned to walk, speak Dingua, Texoracan, and Gaelic, gamble, play the piano, shoot pool, fight with my fists, knives, or swords, ride a horse, pick pockets, or open locked doors. Just like you're probably not interested in which bullies I stood up to or which ones I didn't? When I had my first drink or how I lost my virginity and with whom?

But then if we gloss over too much we might miss that all important fork where I turned onto the Road to Fratricide. Sounds like a bad Hope and Crosby film doesn't it?

I was born at home. Delivered by my grandmother and a mid-wife. I arrived a little earlier than expected and Dad was away. Actually he was busy rescuing Brand from that place where Fiona and Bleys had locked him up, but I wouldn't learn that until I had a chance to read Corwin's chronicles of the Patternfall War. He did make it back in time to comfort my mom and pass out cigars.

Even though everyone said I had my mom's eyes and my dad's laughing smile I didn't really look much like either of my parents. My Dad is short with straw colored hair, pale blue eyes, a sharp nose, and angular features while my Mom is dark. I, on the other hand, had a tuft of golden-red hair, a pale complexion with freckled cheeks, a round face, and soft regular features.

When I was growing up Mom always said that I had my, "Grandfather's blood." I had his hair and eyes alright, but Captain Joe had a square craggy sort of face. Dad never talked about his family while I was growing up but I do remember him once saying that there were redheads on his side of the family, too.

My mother taught me to walk but Dad was the one who caught me the first time I tried it on my own.

I learned to speak Dingua, the hodge-poge speech of the islands, from my Grandmother and my Granduncle Juan; Texoracan, a heavily accented form of Thari, I learned on the streets playing with my friends; and Gaelic from Captain Joe whose manner of speech I also adopted.

When he finally noticed I was picking up a 'provincial ploughboy accent' Dad insisted on teaching me proper Thari but my speech patterns were already set by then. I speak ten languages now and my accent is fairly cosmopolitan but I still cling to, 'a wee bit of a brogue,' in honor of Captain Joe.

Dad taught me to gamble when I was six. I think most of his insistence that I learn to read and do simple math before all the other kids was so I could learn to count cards.

We started with five card stud and worked our way up to exotic stuff like Chemin de fer and Baccarat. It was kind of like a shoemaker teaching his son how to hold an awl. Though I'll never be the gambler Dad is I wouldn't be his son (and you can forget that nonsense about Brand being my father right now, because Random is the only father I've ever known), if I couldn't make a living off of cards.

Dad also tried to teach me to play the drums but I could never seem to get the hang of holding the sticks. Besides, I got hooked on the piano the first time I heard my mother sing. My mother has a beautiful voice, deep and throaty , 'tis perfect for torch songs and the blues. Still, I don't think she would have ever gotten out of Uncle Juan's if it hadn't been for the piano playing of Joshua 'Honey Bear' Timely. Honey Bear was one of the greatest piano men who ever lived, though he would never become known outside of Jazz and Blues circles.

Honey Bear's lack of celebrity was partially due to his fondness for Texacala, that and the fact that despite his surname he couldn't get anywhere on time. But I have always felt that it was his refusal to leave my mother that kept his music from receiving the recognition it deserved. Though he never admitted it to me, I always suspected that he was in love with my mother. But fame never interested Honey Bear anyway, he lived for music, and managed to pass a little of the magic that was in his fingers on to me.

Despite his dexterity with drumsticks Dad was never able to master the pool cue. Oh, he could beat anybody in the bar or honky-tonk but he never could get up on the same level as the true champions. When I was fourteen he bank rolled Fast Eddie Felson's comeback, even had him move in with us for awhile, and that's when I learned to shoot pool. Straight Pool, none of that Nine Ball crap. Fast Eddie said I was a natural talent. I always think it irked Dad that I became better at the game than he was.

Captain Joe taught me how to fight with my fists, Dad taught me how to fight with a sword, and my baby-sitter taught me how to handle a knife.

Dad was always indifferent to horses. To him riding was just something you did to get from Point A to Point B.

I know, I know you want to hear about the baby-sitter, but we'll get to her in a second.

We probably wouldn't even have owned a horse if it hadn't been for my mother. After Dad and singing, horses have to be my mother's greatest passion. You know how all young girls go through a phase where they're mad about horses, well my mother never grew out of her's. Mom insisted that I learn to ride and jump horses at a tender age, but that was okay because I've always liked horses myself and they have always seemed fond of me. Must be genetic, eh?

My baby-sitter's name was Constance Little, but she insisted on being called Mouse. Of course, no one but me ever called her that. To my parent's she was Connie. Mouse, who has big brown eyes and short grayish brown hair that is almost the same color as a mouse's fur, is not a lot older than me, just six years; and in a lot of ways she was more like a big sister than a real baby-sitter.

Mom found her in a gutter outside a saloon with a big black eye and two broken ribs. Mom's maternal instincts must have kicked in big time because she brought Mouse home, patched her up and put her to bed. I was only two at the time and don't remember much except that Dad wasn't happy. Mouse got to stay though, because Mom has this knack for getting what she wants. This time she convinced Dad that I needed a baby-sitter, but the actual truth of the matter is that we just sort of adopted her.

Mouse was not the innocent waif my mother thought she was. Sure she was an orphan, but she was also a thief. We're not talking petty thievery or street kid stuff either, Mouse was a card carrying guild member. Actually it was her father who had been the guild member but he got killed when Mouse was four and the Guild just sort of adopted her as a mascot. The night my mom found her she had just gotten the crap beat out of her by a guy whose pockets she had tried to pick. Her *folks* in Bricktown approved of her new found status as part of our Front Street family so Mouse ended up with two families.

We spent a lot of time together and she taught me some useful skills that my parents would probably have preferred I didn't know. Things like which knives are for throwing and which are for cutting, how to pick pockets, cut purses, pick locks, and skulk about in near darkness. Next to my Dad, Mouse was my best friend while I was growing up.

When I was twelve we had the ultimate adventure together. We slipped by the hired security that guarded a moneylender's office, opened his safe, and 'liberated' all of his available cash. After that Mouse had to go away and I didn't see her for almost three years.

I could only duck a bully until my Dad found out about him. Dad always seemed to have a real hard on for bullies. As soon as he learned I was having a problem with one the two of us would sit down and figure out the

best way for me to deal with him. My personal worst bully was one Jake Klugger. He was a bouncer in one of the places where my Mom sang and I never did figure out why he had in for me, maybe he just didn't like red hair.

This Klugger was a cocky nineteen-year-old who liked to think of himself as a duelist, the Texoracan equivalent of a gunslinger. At thirteen I already knew the basics of sword work but had a lot to learn about dueling. Dad drilled me for six months in dueling techniques then sent me out to challenge Klugger.

When I confronted Jake he laughed in my face. He was a man and I was just a kid, so he told me to go home to my Mother. He also made some uncomplimentary suggestions about what she was probably doing at the moment and with who. But I stood my ground and the other men in the club taunted him until he agreed to fight me. He wasn't that good but I was, good enough that I didn't even have to kill him, at least not then.

I had my first drink when I was five and I snuck some of Honey Bear's Texacala; it tasted awful. I had my first taste of rum when I was ten. I was sailing with Captain Joe on his windjammer the *Gaoth* and working as a ship's boy.

The first time I got really pissed was the day my Dad said he was leaving. I was sixteen and had just gotten in from a date with my girlfriend, who we'll get to in a minute, when I heard my Mom crying. I went to see what was wrong and found her with Dad. She was upset about something and he was trying to comfort her. After she quieted down he took me to one side and told me that he wasn't originally from Texorami and that they'd made him King back home. It wasn't a job he wanted but it was one he couldn't refuse. Now Dad had always been a 'here then not here' sort of guy anyway, but apparently this king stuff was going to be taking up a lot of his time.

We went out that night and hit every bar, saloon, honky-tonk, pool hall, and strip joint we could think of. It took us three days to get though them all, there are a lot of those places in Texorami and Dad must know every one. When we got back my Mom was done crying and Dad was ready to leave. His last words to me were, "Take care of your mother for me. When everything is settled I'll send someone for you, probably your Aunt Fiona." That was my first hint that my Auntie Fi was related to Dad and not to my Mom like I always thought.

I had my first sexual encounter when I was ten. It was with the daughter of our live-in maid, Inez. Her name was Conchita Alvarez and she was a precocious eight-year-old who liked spying on her older sister when she was with her boyfriend and then experimenting with me. The only problem was her sister's boyfriend always closed the door too soon.

We had already tried kissing several times but she was never happy with the results. This time she explained to me that her sister always seemed to have her top off when her boyfriend kissed her, so she took her

blouse off and I kissed her. She still wasn't satisfied. Eventually both of us ended up naked but we never got much past the, 'look no pee-pee' stage. We kept trying but her experiments never seemed to produce the results Conchita was looking for, at least not for several years.

When I was fifteen Mouse came back to Texorami. Either she was different or I was; because I'd never noticed before how pretty she was, even with her hair cut like a boy's. She was scared. Some people were after her, bad people from out of town. She had finally ripped off the wrong people and now they were trying to kill her.

I told her the only way to deal with her problem was to confront the buggers head on. I guess I thought I was Dad because I sat her down and we figured out a plan where the two of us could take these guys down. It was a good plan, and it would have work too, except for one thing, the guys who were after her had friends here in town. I'll give you one guess as to who. That's right, my old buddy Jake Klugger.

Somehow I was not surprised to find Jake running the local white-slavery ring. I was a little surprise to be facing fifteen guys instead of five though. Before I knew it the two of us were knee deep in bad guys and despite our great plan and my unusual strength we'd have both bought the farm if Dad hadn't showed up. He bailed us out that night and I killed Jake.

Jake was lower than pond scum and a slaver to boot but I'd never killed anybody before and it hurt. I remember Captain Jack saying that after you've killed your first man there is no retreating into childhood ever again. I didn't understand what he meant at the time but, unfortunately, I do now.

Mouse tried to comfort me and one thing lead to another, and, like I said, she was a lot prettier than I remembered. I lost my virginity in more that one sense that night and I guess I've been rushing to rescue damsels in distress ever since.

About a week later Conchita came to me. She was all excited because her sister had a new boyfriend who didn't shut the door.

"I know what we were suppose to do now," she explained.

"So do I," I revealed.

"You do?"

I nod, "I've actually done it and it's easy."

It was like I'd kicked her or something.

"You've done it," she pouted.

I nodded and smiled, "It's a lot of fun. Come on!"

I remember taking her hand and her jerking it away, "Not if you were the last boy on earth!"

She was crying as she ran away. Three days later she'd changed her mind. From then until the day I left Texorami, two years later, I would be her 'boyfriend'. Except, of course, when we were fighting about Mouse. At times Conchita was almost as hard to say no to as my mother.

I didn't understand girls then and I don't think I really understand

women now. Sometimes I think that even if I live forever I still won't.

Two days after Conchita finally found out what all the heavy breathing behind her sister's door was about, my Dad made an appointment for me with a woman who specialized in enlightening young gentlemen. Mouse was fun, Conchita was exciting, but this lady was informative.

For fifteen years nothing, then suddenly I'm beating them away with a stick. It was my first exposure to a truism of life that only men seem aware of, women come in bunches. You can go for a year without finding one that's interested, but as soon as you do the rest just naturally seem to line up at your door.

That's the Reader's Digest version of my early years. What do you think? It all seems Bloody boring to me. If that's where I started making the mistakes that led to Llewella's death, I just don't see it. Maybe if I were a sex driven psycho-killer you could make something out of the fact that I killed my first man and 'lost it' on the same night. But I'm not, so what's the point? I sure as Hell don't know!

As I sit here tapping away at this bloody archaic typewriter I have to wonder if anything has a point anymore?

The boughs of the oaks in my Trump window are starting to take on a green hue so I'd best get back to my story.

"Charm is a way of getting the answer yes without having asked any clear questions."

— Albert Camus

It's been four Bloody weeks since I took Caine's hand. An interminably long and boring month that I've spent locked up in my quarters while a tribunal of my elders determines my future. Christ Jesus! How Bloody long does it take for twelve people to make up their Bloody minds.

By the Unicorn! You'd think another Palace Coup was taking place, what with all the politicking and maneuvering that's been going down these last few weeks.

Fiona came to see me today. I love her dearly, but she's enjoying this far too much. I still can't figure out how this entire Bloody affair became a contest between her and Caine, especially since Dad assigned Benedict and Gérard as his special investigators.

I'm tired of my confinement, I'm tired of the endless string of interviews and statements, but most of all I'm tired of the *Game*. I grow weary of being the King in the giant chess game my aunts and uncles are playing.

When I ask Fiona to get me released she gives me that damn bloody smile that always melts my resolve and says, "Soon dear, soon."

'Tis a Bloody good thing that I'm immortal. I could be here a while yet, a Bloody long while!

I got a new guard today, his name is Roger, he's full of questions and loves hearing tales of the family's adventures. When I told him about what happened between Caine and myself his eyes lit up and he started taking notes at a furious pace. Bloody longhand notes, at that! A curious fellow, that one!

Flora came by today. She bribed Roger with some juicy story or other and managed to sneak Megan into my rooms. Meg is a cousin of Lord Rein who was making her first visit to the big city when she fell in with Flora. She is very beautiful, very un-Amberish, and very friendly.

Unlike Roger, my guard, there is nothing curious about Meg. She is almost disconcertingly straightforward for a Primal Plane dweller, seems completely uninterested in Court or Family politics, and is refreshingly unsophisticated. She is innocent but not virginal, a combination I find difficult to resist.

Flora knows me better than I care to admit sometimes, Meg is exactly the sort of company I need right now and I suspect that fate had little to do with her and Flora's chance meeting.

For once I'm quite happy to be confined to my quarters.

I know that I promised to get on with my tale but it occurs to me that I really should try to explain something about my relationships with Fiona and Flora. They are very different than what you might expect considering Amberite personalities.

When I was growing up in Texorami my best friend was my Dad. But his marriage and ascent to the Throne left him with little time for 'knocking around' with me. Or anyone else for that matter. When Dad passed out of the active part of my life he left a gap. A gap that would soon be filled by my two favorite ladies in the world. Any world, just pick one. My Aunts Fiona and Florimel.

I had my first encounter with Fiona when I was six. To this day it remains one of the clearest recollections from my childhood. I remember it like it was only yesterday.

I had just finished a glass of orange juice and was headed back to the kitchen to try and talk Inez, our maid, into squeezing me some more. I remember that the room was suddenly filled with pretty multi-colored lights and when I tried to trap some in my glass I bumped into a beautiful lady. She had a box filled with little paintings. I wanted to see her pictures but I could tell from the way the box clicked shut that it had a lock.

Mouse had taught me about locks and she told me that people only lock

things that they don't want you to have or look at. So I knew better than to ask the beautiful lady to see her pictures.

When the lady saw me she smiled, "You must be Cory?"

She held out her arms like she wanted to pick me up. She was real pretty, I liked her smile, she knew my name, the one that only Mommy and Daddy and Mouse used, and she looked like Captain Joe so I let her pick me up.

When I did her smile got bigger and she said, "I'm your Auntie Fi."

I liked her but I wanted to see those pictures.

We went and found Mommy and she took us to the good room, the one I wasn't suppose to play in cause it was for guests. Auntie Fi put me on the bed while she changed her clothes and told me this really neat story about a magical Unicorn who brought life back into a cold dead land. Her new dress didn't have any pockets and I watched her real careful when she put the box with the pictures in the drawer of the night stand and locked it. Two locks, this was going to be fun.

My Daddy came home and they started talking and pretty soon everybody forgot about me. I went to my room and got the picks Mouse gave me when she said she was making me an honorary thief. The drawer was easy to open but the little box was hard. I took it back to my room to look at the pictures. There were lots but there was one I especially liked. It was of a big man with red hair who, except for his blue eyes, looked a lot like Captain Joe. I looked at that one a lot. Pretty soon I heard Daddy and Auntie Fi coming up the stairs they were yelling at each other. Both of them sounded mad!

Daddy was telling her that it was thoughtless to leave her Trumps lying around where a child could get into them and Auntie Fi was demanding to know how a six-year-old child, she must have meant me, could open a locked drawer.

I wasn't sure until years later, but at the time I could have sworn that the picture of the redheaded man winked at me as they stormed into the room. I remember thinking that the two of them looked funny yelling at each other and that I laughed and told them so. I also remember going to bed that night without any supper.

Fiona has been a friend and a mentor ever since. When I was little she brought me toys or presents and they would always be something that I had asked for but my folks said I didn't need. When I got older she always seem to know when I needed someone to talk to and would show up. She even tried to explain girls to me when I was sixteen and had just had my first big breakup with Conchita.

When I was seventeen she came to the house on Front Street for the last time. When she left I went with her. She brought me to the land of her magic Unicorn, to Amber.

How to I describe Amber to you? How do I make you understand what it is like to be seventeen and stand on the stairs carved into the side of majestic Kolvir and look up into the City of Wonders. How do I describe the

awe, the inspiration, the light-headed almost religious ecstasy the place imbues. I could compare it to Camelot or the lost glories of Byzantium. But the Eternal City is without peers and defies comparisons, whether they be real or exist only in men's imaginations. It is beyond the power of mere words to invoke the range of emotions that one feels the first time you gaze upon her.

After a tour of the city that was over far too soon I met Dad and his wife. It was kind of hard to deal with the fact that Dad had always refused to marry my Mom but was now married to this woman; but Vialle is the kind of person you just can't hate even when you try.

I also met my brother Martin. He was kind of cool. He plays the sax and we talked about jazz and maybe starting a trio or something. He introduced me to my aunt Llewella. She lived underwater, in a place called Rebma.

Llewella offered to take me on a tour of Rebma, which she explained was an underwater reflection of Amber and I accepted. During the tour, which lasted for several days, we got to know one another. Llewella liked to portray herself as a green haired enigma. She wanted people to perceive her as the direct opposite of Flora, who is renowned for being both daring and open but it just wasn't true. Llewella always made everyone think that she was always so serious and distant, but once she finally accepted you and let down her guard you learned that she liked to have fun as much the next guy.

I think that someone hurt her once, maybe Oberon, and that she held people at arm's length because she was afraid of getting hurt again. Maybe she'd still be alive today if she'd never learned to trust me!

But like I said we became friends and even though we were never pals, the way Flora and I are, I always considered her a friend and that is something I can't say about most of my uncles or cousins.

Eventually I met everyone in the family. They were all a lot older than me except for a beautiful blonde named Dennifer. Maybe it was because we were the only kids on the block but we took to one another right away.

After seeing Amber, Fiona took me on the ten dollar tour of the Primal Plane, the real world. Then she sat me down and tutored me on metaphysics and everything else I would need to know in order to walk the Pattern.

First Fiona gave me the Real World then she gave me the Pattern. It would take more time than I have remaining to describe what it was like walking the Pattern that first time, so I won't bother. Besides, if you're reading this you've probably done it and know that its a unique experience.

After that first walk, Fi took me on a whirlwind tour of shadow. When she was satisfied that I had learned everything I needed to know about my new powers and abilities she plunked me down at Harvard on the Shadow Earth to get an education.

What can I tell you about Fiona? She is noble in the aristocratic sense, beautiful, graceful, wise, gentle, and kind. Yes, I know she has a flip-side that is cold, calculating, and tough as nails, but to me she is the archetypal Lady. Worthy of the highest forms of chivalric Fine Amour and High Love.

The ancient Celts of Captain Joe's homeland believed the Goddess to be the embodiment of womanhood in all its aspects. To them she was virgin and caring mother, wise teacher and fierce warrior-queen, sister and passionate lover. Since learning the nature of the Multi-verse and how things work within it I have come to believe that the Ivernian Celt's Goddess is a reflection of Fiona, right down to her red hair and green eyes.

I think I have had a crush on Fiona since that day Conchita first explained to me what one was. Sometimes I think that I feel something besides chivalric High Love for Fiona but the rest of the time my feelings for her baffle and confound me. I love her, but how? To which of her aspects are my feelings bound? Is it virgin, mother, teacher, warrior-queen, sister, or lover? Of one thing am I certain, Fiona is the standard by which I judge all other women but one, my Aunt Flora.

My relationship with Fiona can sometimes be confusing, and even difficult at times, but my relationship with Flora is easy to understand. She is my best friend and my favorite big sister and I love her too. But not in the confusing mixed-up way I love Fiona.

Flora came to Harvard during the second semester of my first year, to rescue me from what she called, 'the tyranny of books'. Flora doesn't believe in advanced education. She believes you learn about life by living and doing rather than by reading so she 'unshackled me from the library,' and took me out to live.

She taught me that being an Amberite could be fun, and that Shadow could be sampled and enjoyed as well as manipulated. We lived in and moved through all sorts of places. With her I learned to become comfortable in any situation. Whether it was a surfer party on the beach at Malibu, the Salon Rose in the Casino de Monte Carlo, or a medieval high court.

Under Flora's tutelage I learned to enjoy the fun and finer things in life. She took a boy and made him into a sophisticated young gentlemen. Needless to say courtly graces and the cosmopolitan tastes of the connoisseur were not talents I was going to pick up chumming around with Dad. Flora figuratively and literally opened new worlds to me.

When she was satisfied that my formal education was complete she asked me, "Now Cory, what do you want to do with your life?"

I told her that I would like to paint. So she created the identity of Corey Lane for me and set me up in a small studio loft on the Left Bank of Paris. It was Bloody bohemian as Hell, I attended the Sorbonne, painted representational art, chased artsy-fartsy women, and played jazz piano into the wee hours of the night.

Flora made sure that her jet-set friends took an interest in my paintings, not to mention my boyish good looks, and I was soon dividing my time between my bohemian friends and the Monte Carlo set.

My nudes were actually beginning to gain a bit of notoriety when Fiona showed up and guilted me back into Harvard. This time I went into Medical School. I figured I might as well put my hard earned knowledge of anatomy

to work. Flora tried to talk me out of it but even she had to admit that some medical knowledge could be a handy thing and that I could paint in Cambridge as easily as Paris.

While I was in medical school Flora introduced me to a girl from Ireland named Mavis O'Shaughnessy. Mavis was studying pre-law at Boston College. We became lovers for a while and she taught me about my namesake the blind bard and how to play the lap harp. I took to the harp even faster than the piano. It was almost magical, as if playing it were something I should already have known how to do.

The only way I can describe Flora is to say the she is beautiful both inside and out. She lives life 110%, all of the time, and loves every minute of it. She is happy, beautiful, and fun. In may ways she reminds me of the aspects of Amber I admire most; bright, beautiful, alive, and bigger than life.

Fiona and Flora are opposite sides of the same coin. One is serious the other is fun-loving. One is calculating the other impulsive. One is tough, powerful, and beautiful the other is beautiful and often underestimated. Fiona always demands my best, in everything I do. Flora only demands my attention. I love them both, deeply, but in two completely different ways. I don't think I could ever be comfortable around Fiona the way I am around Flora, but I don't think that Flora could call me back from death's door the way Fiona might. Okay, that said back to the tale at hand.

"When making a decision of minor importance, I have always found it advantageous to consider all the pros and cons.

"In vital matters, however, such as the choice of a mate or profession, the decision should come from the unconscious, from something within ourselves.

"In the important decisions of our personal life, we should be governed, I think, by the deep inner needs of our nature."

— Sigmund Freud

Five weeks and still no reprieve. Bloody Hell! How long are they going to make me sit here?

I realize that my confinement is intended to be preventive maintenance as much as punishment. I'm sure Dad figures that as long as I'm under lock and key Caine can't get at me and I can't do anything stupid. That as long as I'm 'cooling my jets' there will be no more disruptive incidents.

By the Unicorn! I hope they're not planning to keep me in here 'til Caine cools down. Hell he's still mad at Julian for stealing some girl from him when both of them were young. I'll not rot here for hundreds of years and I won't hide from that bastard Caine!

You probably think I'm whining and in a way I suppose you're correct. I know that house arrest is nothing compared to what they could have done to me, and what's five weeks detention to an immortal? But let me ask you one simple question, "Did they lock up Caine?"

No, of course not! All the bastard did was try to kill me, right? Cut off an Elder's hand and they lock you up and throw away the key. But miss a third generation heart by less than an inch and all you get is sympathy!

What I did might have been wrong but is it just that Caine goes unpunished while I rot away in my quarters?

"No!"

I know 'tis asking a Bloody lot to expect this family to wrestle with notions like justice but they might consider accepting my parole or at the very least accepting bail. Whatever happened too innocent until proven guilty, anyway?

Roger and his stupid book are beginning to bug me! And then there's that damn Trump! These past weeks I've been trying to complete the half finished Trump of the Dragon that Harlan left in my sketch book. You'd think with nothing better to do than study the Bloody thing I'd've come up with something by now, but I haven't!

I've detailed out Harlan's rough, added color, completed the image, and even added a unicorn onto the back. The thing certainly looks like a Bloody Trump, so why doesn't it feel like one? What have I missed?

Course 'tis probably just as well I can't finish the Bloody thing. All I could do with a functional Trump of the Black Dragon is get into even more trouble.

I think I've been putting too much emphasis on form. I've tried to approach this drawing as though it were a portrait but physical shape and image is not enough. I'm beginning to think that Trump Artist's have to see beyond shape, they have to look much deeper into their subjects than mundane painters. Trump Artists have to be able to grasp and capture not only their subject's physical form and personality but their essence as well. They have to be able to paint not just the external but the internal, not just the body but the soul. But how do you paint what is invisible? How does one see the abstract? The soul?

Sweet Jesus! No wonder I couldn't see the answer. I was looking for some deeply hidden metaphysical truth or arcane secret, but the answer is

neither. Was it Sherlock Holmes who said, 'Never overlook the obvious?' I can't remember and it doesn't really matter. All that matters is that the answer was right out in front of me the entire time and I nearly missed it!

So simple! So incredibly simple that it is still hard to believe. I smile to myself and look down at the completed prismacolor drawing of the Black Dragon. Gently, I caress the waxy image pressed into the bristol board pad. The image is smooth, far smoother than any surface the waxy prismacolor pencils could produce. I can't resist yet another smug smile, no longer a mere drawing the image captured on the stiff paper is cool to the touch and now responds to a psychic caress.

"What're you doing?"

The sound of a voice coming from just above my shoulder gives me enough of a start to make me drop the pad. It lies in the center of my art table shimmering with a sort of power I could never see before today. It is only with great difficulty that I am able to tear my eyes from my handiwork and look up. After all these weeks of experimentation the suddenness of my breakthrough still amazes me.

"Cory are you alright?" asks Dennifer.

I look up into big emerald eyes, I still haven't adjusted to her 'new face,' smile and explain, "I'm fine Denna. Just a bit self-absorbed is all. Is it three already?"

She shrugs, "I knocked. When you didn't answer Roger let me in."

I nod.

"Fiona said to tell you that it shouldn't be much longer and not to worry, everything is going well. Is that the drawing of the Dragon you've been playing around with? It looks finished."

As she speaks Dennifer reaches down and picks up the pad. She runs a slender finger over the image and her eyes grow wide with surprise.

"Unicorn's horn! It feels cool like a Trump."

I beam at her and nod.

She looks from me to the Trump and back to me once more, "Congratulations Cory. You've done it! And with no formal instruction." She shakes her head and her deep golden blonde hair flies loosely about her beautiful face, "Amazing!"

I try to give her a humble smile, the only trouble is I'm not feeling terribly humble at the moment, in fact, I feel as if I could probably walk on water, if I tried.

Dennifer gives me an appraising stare. "You've obviously managed to finish one of Harlan's Trumps but do you think you can create one of your own. From scratch? Without any guides?"

"I think so," I answer while trying not to sound too cocky.

"You won't be a real Trump Artist until you've cast an original in your own hand."

"True. Will you sit for me?"

"I'd love to. But not in this old hunting outfit, get your paints warmed up

while I go change."

"Don't bother. My specialty is nudes."

She gives me a wicked grin, which is followed by an ironically innocent laugh, "You wish! I've a lovely new dress and I want to see if you can capture the way the color brings out the gold flecks in my eyes."

"I liked it better when they were blue."

She flashes me a pouty smile, "Don't you think I'm beautiful anymore?"

"I'll always think you're beautiful Denna."

"You'd better!"

"Don't be too long. I don't know how long I can keep Polyhymnia waiting."

"Your Muse will wait. She's a woman, after all, and all of us adore you in our own way, cous..."

Whatever else she had to say is lost as the heavy door to my quarters closes behind her.

Two days later my first Trump is nearly complete. We are just putting the finishing touches on it when Flora barges in on the sitting. She has come to inform me that the many rounds of charges and counter-charges are finally finished and that an open hearing will begin tomorrow but when she spies Dennifer posing she asks, "What are you two up to?" instead.

"Cory's painting my Trump. Isn't he marvelous?"

Flora smiles and admits, "He's quite the talented lad, our Cory. Hmm, I wonder what Fiona will say about this?"

As it turned out Fiona's first words were, "Dworkin will not be pleased."

When I give her a crestfallen look she explains, "He's never thought much of free-thinkers and mavericks in such matters. I remember him telling Brand, 'Don't try to paint until you've learned to draw and don't try to cast Trumps until I've taught you to see.'"

"I can see very clearly on my own!"

"So it would seem, Cory, so it would seem."

It's finally over. Tomorrow Dad pronounces the tribunal's findings. No more waiting. Fiona and Flora both think we've won and that I'll be free.

Dennifer stops by after dinner, but as soon as I see how red her eyes are I know it's not to celebrate my coming freedom.

"Denna, what's wrong?"

"I can't stay here anymore."

"Huh! Why?"

"You belong here Cory. Amber is a part of you and you are a part of it. But I'm not."

"What are you talking about? Oh course you are!"

"I'm not. I've never had the connection to this place that you have. I don't belong. I never have. Not like you, at any rate. I don't even have the right

Pattern."

"You're going to Bright," though I try I can't keep the disappointment out of my voice.

"I have to. Can't you see that! I don't even know my mother. Can you imagine what that is like?"

"No."

"You're very lucky Cory. Do you know that? You've always known who you are. You've always been so certain about what you want. Where you want to go. I've never been any of those things."

"Herdan and the rest may be your blood but they're not your family. There are people here who care a great deal for you. More than any of them!"

She smiles and runs her slender fingers through my hair, "I know Cory but I've lost so much. There are pieces of me scattered all over between here and Bright," I try to interrupt but she hushes me by putting two fingers over my lips, "Before I can know where I'm going I have to know where I've been. Before I can know what I want I have to know who I am. You understand don't you Cory? Please say that you do?"

I look her directly in those damn green eyes and nod, "At least wait a few days so I can go with you."

She smiles then shakes her head, "This is something I have to do myself. You understand me better than anyone, maybe even better than myself, but you can't find what I've lost. Only I can do that."

I can only return her smile and nod.

"You have given me your friendship and trust. Those are rare gifts, Cory, especially here in Amber. I need for you to understand that I'm not rejecting your gift. No matter where I go I will always be your friend."

I want to tell her how I feel about her but I don't really understand most of my feelings myself, all I can honestly say is, "I'll miss you."

She kisses me on the cheek and says, "I'll miss you too." Then with a last smile she turns and walks out of my life.

By the Unicorn but she's lovely right now! As she's leaving I call out to her, "I'll look for you on every beautiful beach I find."

She laughs. I'll always remember the sound of that last laugh.

Two days later I was free.

"A true friend is someone who is there for you when he'd rather be anywhere else."

— Lein Wein

It is good to be free again! To come and go as I please. Forty-six days of house arrest may not seem like much of a punishment to some, but when you are used to being able to roam whole worlds at will, a four room suite can become pretty close quarters.

Good old Gérard! First he fights like Hell to save my life and then he does his damnedest to nail my hide to the wall. 'Tis a good thing Benedict was one of the special investigators or who knows where I'd be today. But I'm glad Gérard was so tough, because it's helped me to make peace with everyone in Amber except Caine.

Caine...

I've not laid eyes on him since that day over a month and a half ago when I cut off his hand and he tried to kill me. Looking back I probably owe my life to the fact that he favors his right hand, the one I took off in my attack. Only the slight awkwardness in his left made him miss my heart by fractions of an inch.

I miss Dennifer. Even more than I thought I would. The urge to go after her is almost irresistible. But it wouldn't be fair to her. Though one may have companions along the journey, no one can find the Grail for you. Dennifer wants to undertake her quest alone and I have to respect her wishes even if losing her hurts. Besides, forever is a very long time, and I know that our friendship will bring us together again someday.

Fiona and Flora have invited me to lunch. Except for their shared interest in me those two have little in common, so whenever I get an invitation to meet them both I know something is up. But this time I can't imagine what it is. I spent most of the afternoon trying to figure out what they're up to but, as usual when I try to figure them out, I come up with zip.

We met in a place on West Vine that Flora is fond of, it's close enough to the harbor district to have color but not so close that gentlefolk shun it. My two favorite ladies are already there when I arrive.

This immediately tells me that something is up. I'm several minutes early, myself, and Flora has never been known for her punctuality. I chalk it up to Fiona's influence. But the fact that Flora is letting Fiona call the shots tells me there is definitely a conspiracy afoot.

After we order I decide to get right to the point, "You two are my favorite ladies in the world, all of them in fact, and I'd never miss an opportunity to have lunch with either of you."

Fiona nods. Flora smiles.

"That said, what's up? What's this all about?"

"Cory, you're such a party pooper," complains Flora through a smile.

Fiona nods in agreement, "We were going to wait until after lunch but since you've already spoiled the drama of the moment, here."

She hands me a long slender brightly wrapped cardboard tube. From the weight and balance I'd guess it contains a sword, probably a rapier.

"Go ahead spoil sport, open it," instructs Fiona in a mock stern tone.

I try to get the wrapping off without destroying it but soon find myself tearing at it to get the gift open. Once I unwrap the cardboard tube and open it a beautiful Italian swept hilt rapier with a chiseled hilt slides out. The blade is polished silver, as bright as chrome, and sunbeams from restaurant's

picture window glint off it revealing the Pattern.

"'Tis marvelous. Has it a name?"

"It is called Tromperie," explains Flora.

"A French name for an Italian blade?"

"It is neither, the Trickster, was forged right here in Amber," explains Fiona, "we wanted to give you a gift to commemorate your return to the Real World."

Flora smiles, "We knew you've been moping about since losing your friend so we wanted it to be something that will take your mind off her, at least a little. I suggested a mystery and Fiona suggested the sword."

Fiona nods, "This then is our gift to you, the sword known as Tromperie, the Trickster..."

Flora adds, "Which has sometimes been called the Trump Blade..."

Fiona flashes me a naughty smile, "We've told you its name, but if you wish to understand its powers and origins you will have to root them out yourself."

"Does it come with a scabbard?"

Flora smiles, "No clues dear."

"We have warned those of the family who know of the sword of our challenge," explains Fiona, "Expect no help from that quarter, this is one mystery you will have to solve for yourself."

I'd have enjoyed the rest of the meal much more if I didn't get a smug insufferable look from either of my Aunts every time I looked at one.

I was quickly able to discover that Tromperie was, in fact, a Trump or at least contained a Trump. Near the quillion and disguised so as to appear to be part of the tracing of the Pattern in the blade is a miniature Trump of the Pattern located in the dungeons below Amber Castle.

Tromperie is a magnificent blade and presents a fascinating mystery but it is one I must put aside for the nonce.

I think I know how to resolve the bad blood between Caine and myself. Or at least I think I have a way of finding out how it might be done. I have determined to walk the shadowy streets of the ghost Amber, Tir Na Nogth. I am hoping that I will find answers there just as Corwin did during the Patternfall War. If not answers then at least insights into how I might deal, or not deal with Caine. Besides, I've been dying for an excuse to go up there ever since I first learned you could. Morgan has agreed to assist me.

Before leaving I make a point of arming myself with Grayswandir, as well as my new Trump blade. I can think of no better weapon, to deal with a hostile shade or two than one forged in the ghostly fires of Tir Na Nogth. herself.

I wait for Morgan just outside Corwin's tomb. Dead leaves, dirt, and other bits of dried up debris swirl out the half-open door as the wind gusts into and out of the mausoleum. Someone should look after this place. Perhaps Corwin should hire a caretaker, or at least a gardener to look after

the roses, even in their untended half-wild state they really are quite beautiful.

When Morgan arrives we climb the stairs that lead to Kolvir's majestic peak where we plan to await the moon rise. At the top a surprise awaits us. Derek is already here. He flashes me a smile full of scorn and derision then turns his taunting grin on Morgan, who rebuffs his puerile challenge with a cold flat glare that would freeze a wiser man's soul. But then wisdom has never been one of Derek's strong suits.

Despite his sometimes infuriating nonchalant attitude, I have never had much trouble from Derek, until now he has given little reason to question his motives, but his presence on the last of the solid steps carved into Kolvir bothers me. Why here? And why now, just when the moon is about to rise? A feeling I can't rationalize keeps warning me to be wary.

When Morgan challenges him, Derek explains that he is waiting for Caine.

No wonder my instincts were warning me away from Derek! He's in league with Caine.

Caine. Life was so much simpler when we ignored one another. You hate me now, and I return the emotion measure for measure, though I really don't understand why. Do you? Why are we enemies? Why must we hate? I want to understand you, though I fear I never will. For the Blood of Amber hating is so much easier than understanding.

To Hell with it and to Hell with Bloody Caine as well! Life stopped being easy when I left Front Street with Fiona. Life in the royal court of Amber is never simple and there will always be enemies. At least I'll know who some of mine are!

I look over to where Morgan is staring down Derek and announce, "We're leaving!"

Just as Morgan begins to spin on one heel there is a rainbow burst between us and Caine pops in. He gives Morgan a cool look and smiles at me. Christ Jesus, how I hate that leering grin of his!

Our eyes lock for a moment but our attention is drawn from one another by the rattle of stone against stone in the direction where Morgan and Derek are. Carefully so as not to lose sight of the others' hands we both turn to find the two Princes at each other's throats.

Since his run in with Morgenstern Morgan has had little reason to love either Julian or his son Derek, both of whom it would seem are now the allies of Caine. Oh well, like father, like son, I suppose.

I try my best to make peace with Caine. I even offer him my hand in exchange for his. He wants nothing to do with my overtures and remains extremely cold. Finally he tells me I can redeem myself, in his eyes, by performing an important mission for Amber.

"As long as the task serves Amber, and not your own interests, I agree."

From my tone I try to make it clear that I would rather die than serve to further Caine's many private agendas, but would gladly accept any labor,

no matter how herculean, that benefits Amber.

"You must journey to the Land of the Dead and there locate Lord Corwin, so that he can be returned to Amber, where he is needed."

Though I know nothing of this, 'Land of the Dead' I accept his challenge and his task, by looking him straight in the eye and nodding.

Morgan, who after all, is supposed to be earning his keep by acting as my protector, asks if he can accompany me. After a moment, Caine flashes him one of his diabolic grins and nods.

Our decision seems to have made Derek extremely nervous. He will look neither myself nor Morgan in the eyes. Instead he spends most of his time studying his feet and avoiding eye contact with anyone, even Caine.

Before I can determine whether or not Lord Corwin is living and lost, or dead and where he belongs Caine summons a gate, that my newfound powers tell me, radiates Trump power as well as something I cannot identify, and practically shoves Morgan and myself through.

"One may live as a conqueror, a king, or a magistrate; but he must die as a man."

— Daniel Webster

We go through Caine's gate and come out in a dark place. The gate fades away as soon as we cross over, leaving us without a direct source of light.

Thus far this Land of the Dead is a disappointment. The name conjures images both mythical and arcane, the Underworld of Dis and Pluto, Donn's domains, the Isle of the Blessed, even Dante's inferno, but so far all we've found is a dark and foggy plain.

After a bit of wandering we encounter a stairway. It appears to be cut into raw stone and bears an uncanny resemblance to the stairs we've just climbed, except that it heads up as well as down.

As I approach the stairs the ambiance of the plain begins to change. When I stand before the first step and look down into the dark I am overcome with a sense of dread and despair, unlike anything I have ever experienced. When I look up the sense of helplessness and oppression becomes overwhelming. Not even Terrene or Reich Shadow combined could match it. Can this murky fog laden plain be nothing more than a landing? A sort of Limbo between Hells?

I look over to Morgan while trying to suppress the involuntary shiver that runs through me.

He gives me a wry smile, shrugs, and asks, "Up or Down?"

We stare at one another a moment then almost simultaneously he says. "Up!" and I say, "Down!"

We both laugh nervously and decide to let a coin decide. I hand Morgan a coin from my purse; he flips it and calls heads while it is still in the air.

Oberon comes up. Morgan wins, again. Damn him! He always wins. Either the man has uncanny luck or he Bloody well cheats. Though I have always suspected the latter, I have never been able to prove my suspicions.

We head up.

As we mount the steps the fog swirls and closes in around us. It becomes all but impossible to see even our hands in front of faces. We are forced to feel for the steps. After one or two we find ourselves at the top of the stairs and the fog clears and reveals a stone wall.

I know for a fact that there were more than two steps ahead of us as we mounted those stairs. Our movement did not involve Pattern or Trump as I understand their use and seemed quite unnatural.

I mutter under my breath something about being magically whisked away but Morgan informs me that no magic was involved.

There is a gate in the wall. It appears to be ajar and the only light we have seen since arriving in this shadowy limbo pours forth, the invitation it offers is either far too obvious or far too subtle. I cannot determine which.

In two strides Morgan is at the gate and swinging it open. When fully opened the gate reveals a large black haired man. He smiles and his eyes glint with flashes of emerald green fire.

"Lord Corwin, you must return with us to Amber," I inform the wayward prince.

Morgan spins around, shoots me a quizzical look, and demands, "What the Hell are you talking about? That's Eric not Corwin!"

"Eric may have died before I came to Amber, but I have met Corwin, and I do know the difference. Corwin has green eyes, Eric's are blue like Deirdre's."

Morgan glares at me, "Well I knew them both, and this is clearly Eric. Look at him! His eyes are blue damnit, not green!"

We glare at one another a moment. I sigh to myself and am thinking that this is no time for another *discussion*, when a random thought occurs to me.

"Perhaps 'tis neither," I explain in a whisper.

"Shape-shifters?" Morgan whispers back.

I nod. "Perhaps, even Lords of Chaos. I won't put it past Caine to be in league with them."

During our exchange the Janus-like figure in the gate utters not a word. When he silently beckons us forward I remind Morgan, who wants to challenge him, of Dameon and Derek's encounter with The Portal to the Land of the Dead, and persuade him to ignore the invitation and explore further on our own.

As we walk though the mist and eerie half-light I am able to determine that Trumps, even ones I have created myself, do not function and that I've lost my connection to Pegs. I point this out to Morgan who informs me that the Pattern here is strange, and that he is unable to manipulate it the way he should. Apparently even Morgan is a Pattern Master. I'm beginning to

suspect that perhaps it is only myself who lacks this talent.

After a bit of walking we come once more to the stairs. Morgan determines to head down this time. I'm a bit reluctant to leave our Janus, who may yet turn out to be Corwin. But I'm even more reluctant to become separated from Morgan in this ghostly limbo, so I follow him down the stairs.

Sometime later, but while we are still on the stairs, we spy a figure vested in naught but tatters, on another misty landing. As we approach it becomes clear that, though thin and gaunt, the figure is male, not female.

Morgan addresses it and it responds by turning to face us. Though it looks in Morgan's direction there is no intelligence in its dull lifeless eyes. This man, if that is what this heap of rags and dried leathery skin truly is, has a dead expressionless face, but his countenance is nothing when compared to his eyes that are so flat and vacant looking that the only thing I can equate them to is the foggy unreal estate that seems to surround this stairway. Though, he reminds me of a zombie from a George Romero movie more than anything else, I can find nothing comical about our mysterious somnambulist, and I can't shake the feeling that I want nothing to do with this eerie individual.

I turn to Morgan, "Leave it, we will learn nothing here, let us continue downward."

At the sound of my voice the creature becomes more animated. It tries to speak to Morgan but all that comes out is a hoarse rasp. It tries again, but apparently its throat does not function properly. On the third try it croaks out, "Who?"

By the Unicorn! Though I have heard it only once ere this 'tis not a voice I'd soon forget. Reaper, the rogue Prince, whom I so recently slew while defending both Amber and the Pattern.

He looks directly at me and I can clearly see the ugly scar on his neck. He studies me a moment, then rasps, "Is this another test?"

Do you remember when you were in school and the girls would drag their nails across the blackboard, well that is how Reaper's voice sounds to me each time he speaks.

I draw Grayswandir, assume the en garde position, and wait for his axe to appear.

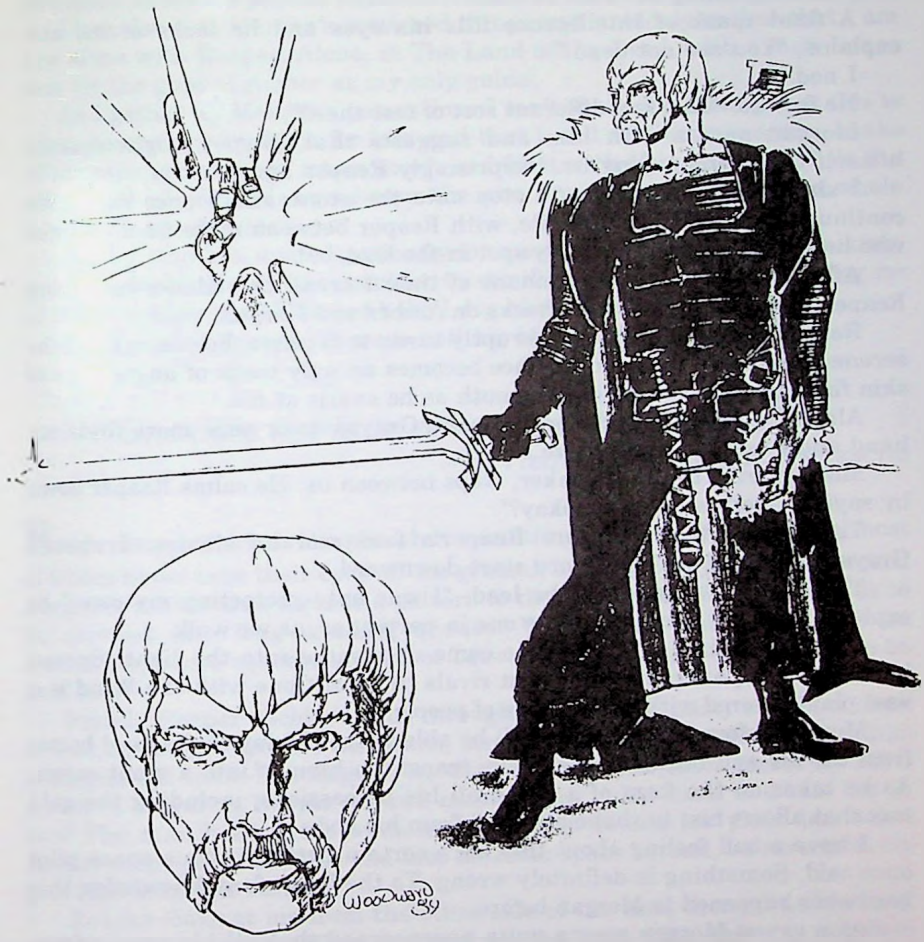
Another spark of life flashes though his vacant eyes as he looks directly at me and demands, "Who?"

I look into his flat dead eyes, fight off a strong urge to shiver, and reply, "'Tis Carolan of Amber, he who slew you in fair combat."

With each word I speak he seems to grow more alive. By the time I have finished his dull lifeless face has an almost serene looking expression on it.

The skin about his lips crack a bit as he smiles and asks, "Combat or Yield?"

He holds out his hand and a sword appears but I offer him neither.



•Morgan•

A sword? I cannot help wondering where his signature Pattern Axe is.

When I do not attack he looks from Morgan to myself. With each passing second his eyes become more alert and alive. Is it my imagination or is his body filling out a bit as well?

A final spark of intelligence fills his eyes and he looks at me and explains, "You are not dead."

I nod.

He frowns. "This is a different sort of test then?"

Morgan agrees with him and suggests that Reaper might redeem himself by accompanying us. Surprisingly Reaper agrees.

I sheath Grayswandir and step onto the stone stairs once more. We continue downward in single file, with Reaper between myself and Morgan who has assumed his customary spot in the lead.

After an indeterminate amount of time I break the silence by asking Reaper about his part in the attacks on Amber and Harlan.

Reaper stops walking and abruptly turns to face me. For an instant the serene look leaves him and his face becomes an ugly mask of anger. Bits of skin fall from the corners of his mouth as he snarls at me.

Almost without thought on my part, Grayswandir once more finds my hand and I assume a defensive crouch.

Morgan, ever the peacemaker, steps between us. He calms Reaper down by saying, "Let's start over, okay?"

The serene look reenters Reaper's face and he shrugs. I sheath Grayswandir and we once more start downward.

This time Reaper takes the lead. "I was only protecting my own," he explains, over his shoulder, to no one in particular, as we walk.

After a hundred odd steps we come once more into the light. Spread before us in a panoramic view that rivals those of Gone with the Wind is a vast plain covered with a multitude of people.

Morgan informs me that he will be able to see the lay of the land better from the air and begins to magically transform himself into a giant raven. As he takes on the form of a raven all his possessions, including the gold torc that allows him to shape-shift fall from his body.

I have a bad feeling about this, as a certain fictional rogue space pilot once said. Something is definitely wrong. To the best of my knowledge this has never happened to Morgan before.

As a raven Morgan seems quite unconcerned that all his possessions, even his Pattern charged spear, are strewn about the ground. Worse still, he does not respond to my inquiries. I have a bad feeling about this indeed!

Morgan takes flight but instead of circling for a better view of the plain before us he simply flies off. I call to him but he seems oblivious to any attempt on my part to get his attention. It's almost as if he has lost his identity and truly become a raven. The loss of one's true identity is always the greatest danger to those who would be something other than that which the Pattern intended that they be.

As I watch Morgan fly out to the horizon, then pass beyond it and out of sight, I cannot help thinking that all his scheming and dabbling in magic has finally caught up with him. Nothing's ever for free and Morgan has just made at least a partial payment for all his tricks and hidden powers.

I look down at Morgan's scattered things and suddenly realize that I am now alone with Reaper. Alone, in The Land of the Dead, with a man I once slew for the good of Amber as my only guide.

As I gather up Morgan's possessions I can't shake the feeling that this is only a temporary set-back for him and that I will see Morgan again. I take off my cape and make it into a pouch and fill it with Morgan's stuff. I tie the pouch to the haft of his spear near the iron tipped head and toss the whole thing over my shoulder.

Reaper who has waited patiently for me to finish, then begins walking, only once looking over his shoulder to see if I'm following him. Looking for all the world like a well-heeled hobo I dog his footsteps.

Neither of us speaks. There is nothing to say.

"One does not hate so long as one despises."
— Friedreich Wilhelm Nietzsche

Reaper wants to cross the plain but a multitude of dull listless people, most of whom never take their eyes off the ground, block our way. As we approach I begin to realize that there is a pattern to their arrangement, they appear to be arrayed into long winding queues. We spend what seems like an eternity trying to squeeze around or between them, but the lines seem to be endless.

Finally Reaper decides to cut through a line and a nasty scuffle ensues. A woman, whose spot he threatens, screeches at Reaper and claws at him with gnarled talon-like fingers. As they tear at each other pieces fly off. I watch in horror as Reaper's sword materializes in his hand and cuts her in two. The man behind the woman steps up to defend his place but when Reaper steps out of the line and into the clear space beyond, he reverts to his previous lethargic state.

Reaper looks at me from the other side of the line, then turns his back and begins to walk. When he gets to the next line there is another commotion and his sword swings several times, once more he steps though and the people in that second line settle down to their waiting as though nothing had just happen.

I quickly realize that I have but two choices, follow or be left behind. I cannot see myself hacking my way though innocent people whose only crime is not wanting to lose their place in some damnable line but some deep felt instinct warns me not to lose Reaper. Reluctantly I take Tromperie into my hand and step up to the first line. I try pushing and shoving but

ultimately resort to hacking my way through.

As I crash though the first line I'm horrified to see the two halves of the women cut down by Reaper wriggling and squirming back together. What the Bloody Hell kind of place is this! Are these people truly all dead, after all! If so, it makes what has to be done a bit easier to accept, if no less ugly.

As I advance I cut a bloody swath through the lines of the protesting dead. Tromperie swings in great silvery arcs smashing, lopping, and bruising heads, arms, and other limbs until I catch up with Reaper. We crash though a last line only to find ourselves up against the bank of a raging river.

Crossing this River Styx is no easy task for it is full of wailing shrieking dead who cling to anything solid as they wash by. As we stand near the bank I can only conjecture that these dead no longer await judgment on the plains behind us but have been accursed to spend eternity in this River of the Damned.

As the maelstrom rushes by the damned plead and wail for help. One bumps ashore near enough to grab my leg. Her grip is like iron and when I finally break her hold she manages to grab my hand in another vise-like grip. Her head and upper torso are out of the water now and I can see that she must have been incredibly beautiful before she became shriveled and discolored by the water, she might even have been as beautiful as Flora or Meriad.

As we wrestle she begs and entreats me to pull her out. She promises me delights and rewards unimagined but Reaper commands that she be cast back. Our eyes meet for the briefest of moments. Never before have I seen so much agony and torment reflected in a human soul. I can't help think that here is a damsel most distressed.

Rescue would be so easy. I have almost decided to pull her out when another lost soul bumps into the damned beauty and latches on tight, then another, and another.

Reaper grabs me around the waist and screams at me to let her go. The sheer weight of their multiplying numbers drags us both toward the River of the Damned and in the end frees me from the onus of deciding the damned beauty's fate.

I am left with no choice but to release her before both Reaper and myself are dragged into the hellish waters with her and her companions. But I will never forget the look on her once lovely face as her hand slips from mine and she plunges back into the raging waters.

Reaper continues down stream. I follow, a step behind. We walk, and walk, and walk. And though an eternity seems to have passed I cannot drive the woman's last pleading look from my mind. Whenever I manage to summon a happier more pleasant memory it is immediately shattered by the dirgeful wailing from the River which reconjures her soulful image.

Reaper never speaks and the cries of the Damned fill my existence and become my only company in this hellish place.

Though I cannot shut their tortured cries from my mind I avoid the River with my eyes. Staring straight ahead I burn a hole into Reaper's back, but he doesn't even notice the flames.

I hate this place! I'm a man of action and thrive on adventure. The idea of spending the rest of my immortal life trooping along behind a brooding dead man going nowhere, frightens me. It frightens me and sets me to brooding myself.

There is an unnatural wrongness here. Nothing is as it should be. Everything good feels vile and that which should feel vile is good. The Place *feels* wrong, an unavoidable wrongness that gnaws at your bones until you let it become a part of you. I do not fully understand what is happening to me but I resolve to do two things, to fight the wrongness and to walk on. I focus on taking step after step. Eventually, summoning the will necessary to follow behind Reaper becomes the most important thing I have ever done in my life.

We walk, and walk, and walk...

"Damn you Caine! Damn you to the same Bloody Hell you have consigned me to! I won't give up! Do you hear me? I won't give up! I'll not be after embarrassing the O'Rafterys. Not now, not ever!"

...step after step after step. One foot after another. Lift the right foot then the left, then lift them both again. Walk, and walk, and walk!

I am lost and alone. I cannot reach Pegs. I cannot even touch the Pattern! I will not give in to despair! I will not lose to that Bloody bastard Caine.

Concentrate on the Pattern. The Pattern, it has become so much a part of me, that young though I am and still new to its embrace, I cannot remember or even imagine what it was like to be Patternless.

Can you imagine total isolation and complete unreality, without even the Pattern for an anchor. For your own sake I hope you cannot, but try anyway. Then imagine a world filled with nothing but the pleading wailing cries of the Damned and your own Bloody footfalls. Have you got all that? Good. Great! Now, this is the most important part, this is what's really and truly hard, don't stop walking, don't get left behind.

"'Hat's it. Keep 'er com'n! 'Tis just one wee step after 'he Bloody other. Very good! By George I think she's got it!"

'Tisn't just the Land of the Bloody Dead 'hat I'm in, 'tis Hell. But I don't believe in Hell do I now? 'Here is no God! No Heaven, no Hell, only Amber! Only the Pattern! Only the Pattern is real. Only the Pattern. The Pattern.

"Christ Jesus! 'Tis coming apart I am."

You know this is just what that Bloody bastard Caine wants don't ye boyo?

The Pattern, only the Pattern is real!

I won't let Caine beat me.

Only the Pattern is real! Only the Pattern.

Caine.

I hate Caine! No, not hate, that's too simple, too clean. I despise him. I despise Caine. I refuse to lose to that Bloody bastard even if it means forfeiting my immortal soul! I'll never give up! No surrender! Do you hear me you Bloody bastard? I spit at you from the gates of Hell! No fucking surrender!

Only the Pattern is real.

The Pattern and my hate.

Walk, and walk, and walk.

Shut out the wails; only the Pattern is real!

Walk, only the Pattern, walk, the Pattern, and walk.

Only the...

Whoa, that was close! I almost lost it.

What's that you say? You think I did lose it.

If that's true then 'twas the Pattern that brought me back, even in this lost and forsaken place where everything, the Pattern's powers included, are queer and distorted, it managed to bring me back again.

Reaper is still in front of me and we are still walking.

I mustn't let myself sink back into that mire of despair, again; I might not be able to crawl out a second time even with the Pattern and Caine.

I have to find a way to make light of my current situation, if I'm going to survive it, that's what Dad would do. I wish he were here, he can make a joke out of anything.

A joke, eh? "Say did you ever here the one about the guy who went to Hell and when he got there complained that, 'I'm not dead yet. Truth is I'm...'"

This isn't going to work. I'm not Dad!

To keep my mind from wandering over the Abyss I try thinking about Hell. I mean what the Hell is it, anyway? I don't know about you but I always imagined that Hell, if it existed at all, as an individual thing, with different punishments for different folks, suiting not only their sins but their personalities as well.

Sweet Jesus! I despise this place! But not as much as I despise the bastard who put me here. Caine. Just the thought of him makes me smile, it is a most unpleasant smile, and one that immediately reminds me of my hated Uncle.

I shudder and stop dead in my tracks, pun intended.

I begin to laugh, softly at first and then louder and louder. Reaper still walking ignores me.

The Blood runs true! I've been told that often enough. 'You're one of us, best to grow up and accept that certain things are expected of you.'

Reaper stops and slowly turns to look at me with his dead eyes.

"No!" I scream while tearing handfuls of rotten rags from his body in an attempt to grab him and drag him over to me.

"I refuse to become one of them. Do you hear me? No matter what you put me through I won't let you turn me into one of them!" my voice trails off to a whisper on the last word.

Reaper spins on his heel and begins walking again. I don't think he even heard me! I brush water out of my eyes and mumble into his back, "We could have been so much more."

We walk, and walk, and walk.

By the Unicorn, I can stand it no more! That devious sonofabitch, Caine, outdid himself this time. What more fitting a fate for an idealistic would-be hero than to be surrounded by agony and suffering and to be unable to do even the littlest thing to ease it. The self-imagined Champion with no one to protect, the Warrior without a foeman. He has sent me among the dead to face enemies so insubstantial that not even Grayswandir, forged 'neath the shimmering moon in the ghost forges of Tir Na Nogth can harm them.

How do you fight boredom and your own conscience? How do you battle with you own soul?

Just when I'm convince that I'm losing my sanity, if not my soul, Reaper speaks. Without turning or slowing his pace he asks, "Why are you here?"

The harsh whispery voice grates on my soul, even so 'tis a welcome diversion from the wails of the Damned.

"What is it you seek?" he demands.

"I've come for Lord Corwin."

He smirks and asks, "Is that what you really want? Care you not for the fate of your own father?"

"What know you of my father," I demand.

He smiles but says nothing. We stare at one another for a time.

Reaper's stare is blank and devoid of emotion. Hate would have been something I could fight, but his apathy leaves me feeling helpless.

Finally, after what seems like hours, he speaks, "Of him who is King, now in Amber, I can tell you much," he whispers. "Though living still he dwells now amongst the dead, as do you. He came to this place through a portal filled with sanguine colors that appeared in Harlan's quarters in Amber."

Filled with colors? Could he mean a Trump Gate? And what has any of this to do with Harlan.

"Is Harlan here as well?"

"He is."

"Why Harlan's quarters?"

"It was for him that the portal was intended."

"Why? Of what interest is Harlan to the Damned?"

His only reply is a shrug and a sinister grin.

"Tell me of this portal?"

"It appeared in Harlan's quarters and through it both Harlan, Random, and the one called Jeremi were attacked by dead things whose pale white bodies were transparent enough to allow one to see their blood red veins. When Harlan stepped through the portal the King, realizing that he had no Pattern, decided to follow him. The Portal has since closed trapping both

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Harlan and Random, here, just as you yourself are trapped."

I spin Reaper around, so that I'm talking to his face and not his back, look him directly in his lifeless eyes and demand that he take me to my father.

He smirks again and replies, "If that is what you really want."

I gesture for him to lead on and he begins walking again. To his back I suggest that we might try to find Morgan on the way.

Reaper shrugs and I can almost imagine another smirk as he informs me that, "For now his fate is of no importance to you."

This is not the answer I wanted to hear. I could really use Morgan's help, not to mention the sound of a friendly voice, about now.

A few moments ago all I wanted was to hear the sound of any voice, beside the screeches and wails of the Damned, but Reaper is already beginning to irritate me. It must be this damnable place, I can usually contain my anger better. But none of my normal emotional checks and balances seem to function here. The longer I stare at Reaper's back the angrier I become. Until finally I tell him, "If you're supposed to be my spirit guide, then why don't you teach me a lesson."

Reaper slowly turns around, flashes me a truly mad grin and laughs in my face. His laugh is a bitter dead thing; it reminds me of the barking of hounds when they have cornered their prey. Almost as soon as I hear it I regret my rash remark.

Suddenly the river is gone and I find myself standing back on the plain where I lost Morgan, the lines seem not to have moved at all since Reaper and myself forced our way though them. I speak to the last man in line, he turns to address me and is wearing Eric's face.

"Who are you?" he asks.

"Carolan, son of Random, and heir to the throne of the Eternal City."

He shakes his head sadly and says, "Dead so soon?"

I try to explain to him that I'm not dead but he frowns and turns his back on me.

I tap him on the shoulder, he turns in my direction again, but is no longer Eric.

I ask the stranger how long he has been standing in this line and he explains that except for a couple of years when he went exploring he has been in the line since the days of the old king.

When I ask just how long that might be he replies, "A couple thousand years, near as I can figure. I've made excellent progress thus far don't you think?"

His question takes me completely aback. The idea of standing in this line with nothing to do for over 2000 years drains away the last of my bravado. I collapse to the ground, bury my head in my hands, and weep. I embrace despair and let is wash over me again and again as I wallow in self-pity.

Eventually, who knows how many life times later, Reaper reappears

and asks, "Well, young Prince, did you learn anything? Are you ready to fight me now?"

I am growing to despise him almost as much as I despise this place. Almost as much as I despise Caine. Hate surges though my veins and my anger seems to invigorate me. 'Tis funny don't you think how real anger and hate seem here compared to everything else.

I stand up, dust myself off, and look him straight in his dull lifeless eyes. "Yes I have. And no I won't."

I smile and point in no particular direction, "Lead on McDuff, surely one as aged and clever as yourself has other lessons to teach one so raw in his arms as myself."

He frowns a moment then shrugs and begins walking.

"No, better yet, take me to my father." I grab him and spin him around to face me, "Take me to my father now!"

One side of his dead face cracks into a wry smile, then he breaks away from me, turns on one heel, and starts to walk again.

I stare at the pieces of what I hope are rags in my hands a moment, then toss them away in disgust and follow.

I have barely taken three steps when a voice calls to me; it seems to belong to Jake Klugger. I turn in its direction. He is tied to a big four poster bed, a long line of battered women seem to be having their way with him but he doesn't seem to be enjoying it much, in fact, they seem to be fucking him to death. Even as I watch he appears to die only to be revived by his tormentors. He begs me for help as a woman with broken chains dangling from her wrists and ankles mounts him, I smile and turn my back, it seems that there is a certain degree of justice in this place after all.

I hurry to catch up with Reaper. We walk, and walk, and walk.

An eternity passes in which I cannot prevent my mind from wandering wildly, my thoughts refuse to settle down and my imaginings take on that inconsistent quality that dreams often have. Could that be what this is? A dream? My guilty conscience trying to resolve my problems with Caine? Is this just a nightmare? Will I wake up in my bed back in Amber where all I'll have to deal with will be the real Caine? I hope so, but think not.

Though we no longer follow the River the cries of the Damned are everywhere. And though I cannot close them from my mind, I can channel my anger and hate in ways that will sustain me and carry me past their banshee wails.

Suddenly a ten foot stone wall appears. There is a gate in its center. I know this place! I have been here before. I was here with Morgan. How many lifetimes ago was that?

I look at Reaper and shake my head. It makes me feel much better to know that all this time we have not been wandering aimlessly, but were instead cleverly traveling in circles!

Reaper leaps to the top of the wall and gestures for me to follow. I make the jump with next to no effort.

Interestingly enough the wails of the Dead and Damned do to not seem to carry over the wall. The lands beyond the wall end in a cliff, at the cliff's edge sits a heavy stone chair, in the chair rests a man. People are led though the gate to the seated figure, they kneel, he addresses them, and they are led off.

It suddenly occurs to me that this is the front of the endless line that covers the Plain outside. This is what they are all waiting for? Somehow I'd have expected a bit more pomp and circumstance. Christ Jesus, the man in the chair barely looks interested in that he's doing.

I look at Reaper, who is balancing next to me on the wall's narrow top, "That is not my father."

His only reply is a smirk.

Since Reaper is going to be no help I look back in the direction of the seated man. As I watch he passes judgment on a woman who accepts her sentence with dignity and grace. As she walks away the guards drag up another, this one kicks and screams the whole way. When the guards dump him before the man in the stone chair he begins to whimper. The *King* says something I cannot make out and the man wails loudly and clutches at his feet. It is a pitiful sight, if the time of my judgment ever comes I hope I can be as brave and noble as the woman.

I look over at Reaper to see his reaction. He has none.

The King rises from his seat and walks over to the ledge. As he does so he passes closer to the wall and I can see his face more clearly. In my surprise I'd have done a proper job of falling off the narrow wall, right there and then, but for Reaper who grabs me by the belt.

Bloody Christ! 'Tis Dworkin, himself! Well, not the hunchbacked dwarf we all know and... well, the one we all know. But he looks exactly like Dworkin did when he changed right after the Primal Pattern began to blink, the time he lost all his deformities.

The Dworkin clone looks first to the woman and then to the man then points ominously toward the ledge. The brave and noble woman steps off. The base coward has to be thrown. His screams echo up to us for a long time.

Reaper points to the King and in his harsh scratchy whisper instructs, "Cut off his head." His voice is cold and flat and completely lacking in emotion.

I stare at him a moment then shake my head and leap down off the wall. My landing is light and nearly inaudible but the King turns in my direction anyway. Perhaps my presence here is easier to detect because I am the only one here who is not dead.

I give him a half-bow and ask, "Who are you?"

He flashes me a wry smile and answers my question with a question, "Who do you want me to be?"

Unlike most of my Aunts and Uncles I've never liked this game. I like it even less when his face transforms into Oberon.

"Kill him now!" hisses Reaper.

"This countenance does not please you? Yet you thought me a king, did you not?" His face changes into Gwynt, "Perhaps a friend then?"

"Cut off his head, now!" commands Reaper.

I glare at him and he frowns. He tries several other faces, some of which I don't even recognize. After each change Reaper demands his head.

Finally I ask him again, "Who are you?"

His only reply is to assume the face of my father.

I am beginning to have a hard time controlling my anger. All emotions, but most especially anger and hate, seem magnified here as is my prejudice against shape-shifters.

I look the King in the eyes and tell him, "'Tis not in the mood for games that I am, faceless one."

He smiles and changes into Aurelia.

Reaper rasps, "Kill *it* now!

Almost without consciously willing it my hand closes around the hilt of a sword.

Reaper leans forward, "Kill it!"

The King grins stupidly.

I suck in a breath while trying to squash my growing anger. Slowly I let it out then quietly ask, "Tell me, O Judge of Men, what should I do next?"

"Get back in line," the shaper explains in a cool, flat, unemotional voice, "and at the end."

Anger washes over me like a tidal wave. For a single instant I feel completely calm, then I flash him a crooked grin and in one smooth blindly quick motion draw my sword and cut off the shaper's head. Just before the head leaves its shoulders it manages a surprised look. I look down at Grayswandir's silvery blade but there is no blood.

I sheath the night sword and spin on Reaper. His sluggish reactions barely allow him to register surprise before I grab him by the shoulders and shake him as hard as I can. His head jerks back and forth on his shoulders like a rag doll's and bits of his tattered form fly off in every direction. This time I don't give a damn whether they're rags or not!

I rein in my anger long enough to demand, "Take me to my father, now!" Then give him several more hard shakes to emphasize my words.

He actually winces as his head snaps back from a particularly vicious shake.

I glare at him with nothing but hate in my eyes.

He doesn't say a word only smiles and points. If his ragged clothing had been a robe he would have looked just like the Ghost of Christmas Future.

I follow the line of a bony pointing finger and see the first bright colors I've seen since I arrived in this dark dreary place. I rush toward the brilliant green hues and after only two or three bounds find myself in a woods that immediately reminds me of the Arden.

Amber, ever eternal, ever beautiful, and ever perfect.

Just thinking of her brings tears to my eyes. For a moment I fight them back then with a shrug let them flow freely. As they run down my cheeks the uncontrollable anger that nearly consumed me begins to ebb away. Thank the Unicorn, I've still something left inside besides anger and hate!

I look back at Reaper but he only points. I step deeper into woods, which appears to be an island of lush life in a sea of dried up, decayed, and dead places.

It seems strange to be in charge of my own path. As I tread lightly through acorns and carpets of fallen leaves I can't help but notice how much these woods look and even feel like the Arden. There is one hoary old oak in particular that I'd swear I saw once while riding with Julian.

I step around the great oak and spy a ridiculously huge turtle shell.

As I stare a vaguely familiar voice echoes out from inside. "Please don't hurt me!" it implores.

Suddenly Reaper is beside me. I can hear his harsh rasp in my left ear, "It's brother Brand," he explains, "Cut off his head too!"

"Ohh... nooo!" wails the voice from inside the giant shell, "Not again. Please, please don't hurt me!"

"Impotent hate is the most horrible of all emotions; one should hate nobody one cannot destroy."

— Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

I look from Reaper to the turtle shell. Reaper's face is blank and expressionless in a way that only the dead might achieve. The Turtle continues to wail and plead.

"Doe... don't listen to him!"

The voice is hauntingly familiar but I can't place it through all the echoes. I step closer to hear better.

"NOoooo! PAH-lleeease don'thurtme."

As I approach the shell the voice becomes less distorted but I still can't...

Of course! Despite its maleness it reminds me of Fiona.

Sweet Jesus! 'Tis himself. Reaper claimed it was him and he sounds just like Fi. But he's Dead. I watched as his body was cut to flitters then burned to a crisp. He was very dead. But then this is the Bloody Land of the Dead 'tisn't it. Reaper was certainly dead after I cut off his head and he's walking around.

Brand.

He went into the Abyss before Fiona brought me to Amber. Until now he was nothing more to me than stories and an unresponsive picture in a deck of cards. This must be him, the similarity in his speech pattern to Fiona's is

unmistakable, stronger even than the one between Fi and Bleys. But a turtle?

"Brand?" I ask softly.

The voice inside the giant carapace hisses angrily, "Go away!"

"Brand."

"I said, 'Go away!' They're watching." The belligerence in his tone denotes a dramatic mood swing.

"If you are the Prince of Amber who is also the youngest son of Oberon and Clarissa then I cannot. At least not until we have spoken." I explain while furtively glancing over my shoulder for *Them*.

"No." he orders in a calm but stern and commanding voice that would seem to indicate yet another mood change.

I feel my own anger returning despite my best efforts to resist. Control of negative emotions is too damn difficult in these hellish lands and Brand isn't helping.

Bloody Hell, he acts more like a petulant child than the infamous villain and architect of the Patternfall War!

"Come out and talk to me now!" I demand in my most commanding tone.

"You just want to hurt me," he wails, "everyone wants to hurt me!"

You can almost hear the tears in his voice. I make one last effort to rein in my growing anger.

A petulant child or perhaps a badly frightened one I think to myself. 'Tis an amusing notion that. Brand, self-styled Lord of the Universe, reduced to a state of bravery equal to a small sheepish child caught out of range of his mother's skirts.

I speak to him as I would that child. In a calm voice I explain, "I won't hurt you."

"Ha! That's what the others all said, too!" he explains in a sarcastic tone that does not quite wash away the child-like quality in his voice.

"Others?"

"Oberon, Random, and that nasty little Harlan," he mumbles through his tears. "They all said, 'I won't hurt you Brand.' Then just as soon as I stuck my head out WHAM! They cut it off. Everyone wants to cut my head off!"

"Random was here? When?"

"I don't remember. Now go ah-way!" he pouts.

"Brand, if you come out of your shell and talk I won't hurt you."

"You will! I know you will! They'll make you." I can almost hear the nod in his voice as he speaks.

"I could promise..."

He stops snuffling long enough to chuckle, "You're from Amber. Don't bother to deny it, I can sense these things. Oh yes, I can! A promise from a Prince of Amber, that's a laugh. They are all liars in Amber. Hell I was a lair. We are all of..."

"I am not a lair..."

"Of course you are. It's in your blood, the Blood of Amber. Now stop pestering me and go away," he spits back before I can finish, his voice now free of its child-like quality.

"I'm..."

"You're a liar, and that's that," he stampedes over my words giving me no opportunity to finish my attempted introduction.

My anger comes rushing back. I glare at the ludicrous bright green shell. This is like talking to a Bloody giant pet shop turtle! "You're beginning to make me mad Brand!"

A little whimper echoes out of the giant carapace.

Look, I know he's a nut case and you know he's a nut case, Hell even a fan of St. Elsewhere could see he's nuts, and I didn't completely waste my time while I was at Harvard Medical, it's just that Princes of Amber are not known for having superhuman patience to go with their exceptional strength.

Based on his mood swings I'd diagnosis him as a manic-depressive with acute paranoiac tendencies but that knowledge doesn't make fighting my returning anger any easier.

"Everyone hates me," he complains in a bitter tone. "You hate me! You're just like all the rest... Amberites!" He enunciates the word in such a way as to make it seem somehow unclean.

My returning anger flares and my hand seeks out Tromperie's hilt.

"Bloody Hell! I cry while pounding on the upper shell with my left fist, "I'm Carolan and not like the others. Now come out of there you great Bloody twit!"

A handsome red headed face pops out from behind the natural green armor and asks, "Carolan?" in a surprised almost pleased sounding voice.

I'm beginning to find the speed with which all these mood swings take place disorienting.

"You won't hurt me?" He begs in a voice that could easily belong to a lost five-year-old but never to an adult.

Our eyes meet, mine are hard like emeralds and give away nothing, his are tear filled, forlorn, and tender like baby grass.

He smiles, trying to disarm my obvious anger. Still taken aback by the suddenness of his appearance I can only stare for several moments. He fidgets under my scrutiny.

I sigh while trying to expel some of my anger, crack a wee smile and start to explain that, "I won't hurt..."

"Use the sword," rasps Reaper in his harsh whisper, "cut off his head!"

"NOOoooooo!" wails Brand and his head disappears into the Shell with an audible pop.

Anger and frustration flare inside me. I don't know who I am more angry with, Brand or Reaper, but Brand is closest so I pound on his shell a second time. It hurts my hand but the whimpering that comes from inside is

almost satisfying.

I count to ten. Walk around the shell three times and take several deep breaths. When my anger has subsided at least a little I try again.

"Brand, I'll swear by the Unicorn, that I won't cut your head off, if you come out and talk." My voice is calm and controlled but too loud for polite conversation.

"Really?" he asks in a cheerful tone, his terror giving way to childish delight, in still another dramatic mood shift. The shell stirs and I detect a glint of green just on the edge of the shadow that obscures the hole his head pops out of. With his head still mostly covered he scans the area until he spots Reaper.

"Oh-kay, but send him away first," he pouts, "he hates me!"

I glare at Reaper and he stalks off.

"He's gone now, you can come out."

"You said you'd swear."

"Bloody He... Alright, alright. I swear by the Unicorn that Reaper is gone and that if you come out I wouldn't cut off you head. There, now..."

He pops out again. This time he is smiling. His mood shifts are fascinating if disorienting. I had a professor at Harvard who would love to get this Turtle on his couch twice a week.

"When was Random here?" I ask.

"It is hard to say. Oberon cut my head off, oh, must've been about a week ago. So Random must have been round about... Hmm, it couldn't have been too long ago. Today I think. Maybe only a few hours ago. Wham, off it rolled. I'd only just gotten it back on when that nasty Harlan came by and, wham, cut it off again. Losing your head hurts, you know, a lot; and it makes it hard to remember stuff, too!"

"Where did Random go?"

He looks right past me when he talks, "They all hate me, you know? They say I've done bad things but it isn't so..."

"Where did Ran..." I try to interrupt him but he just ignores me.

"There were too many Patterns," he explains, "they were creating disturbances, Shadow storms, and other even more dangerous phenomena. Still are too, I'll wager! I didn't want to destroy the Universe I wanted to save it. My plan was to create a single new Pattern that would erase the other ones, the broken ones, and return the multi-verse to its original, purest state. There can only be one Pattern. That is the way things were meant to be. That is the way they must be!

"I am a creator, not a destroyer. I would have created a perfect world. It was Corwin and his damnable curse that ruined everything."

He looks me right in the eyes and with absolute serenity in his voice asks, "Wasn't it Corwin who opened the way from Chaos to Amber? Wasn't it Corwin who then tried to kill Eric and deny Amber the protection of the Jewel of Judgment? Wasn't it Corwin who tried to forcibly seize the throne? Wasn't it Corwin who brought guns into Amber, where none belong. Wasn't

it Corwin who, when his many schemes were failing, created a Pattern of his own and thereby weakened all reality to gain personal power. And isn't it Corwin who is responsible for all those ugly roads that criss-cross reality like some out of control urban development project?

"Why then, I ask you, am I branded a villain? Why was I left for dead then murdered without mercy? I'll tell you why, because the winners write the histories and the one you know was authored by Corwin. Its heroes are Corwin and Caine and its villain is me. Now I ask you, is either Corwin or Caine the Hero type?"

My eyes flash green fire at the mention of Caine's name and despite myself I find that I am nodding in agreement to his words. Despite his grandstand play at the edge of the Abyss, Caine is certainly no hero.

"It would have been a different story if I hadn't been betrayed by that bitch I used to call a sister. She's the one nailed Martin, you know. Wasn't me at all! I have to give the little slut credit though, she saw the handwriting on the wall and maneuvered to save her own ass. It was easy enough to pin her own crimes on me, especially since she was the one explaining what I was up to."

His voice rises in volume and pitch as he begins to speak about Fiona. By the time he's through he is ranting again.

He nearly had me with Caine but I will not listen to his mad ravings about Fi! The more he goes on about her the angrier I become. When my body tenses and my knuckles turn white from clenching Tromperie's hilt he begins to become aware that he has gone too far. As I glare into his eyes I see his expression change from haughty aloofness to fear. He gulps and rushes on.

"Fiona and that bastard Caine. He murdered me just as surely as your friends did back at the Abyss. I hate him!"

It seems that we have something in common after all. Some of the tension leaves me, my grip on Tromperie loosens and I smile.

"They are not my friends," I explain.

"Spoken like a chi..." he stops in mid word, grins, and asks, "How is Morgan?"

I explain that Morgan is here, somewhere, but that I've lost him.

"Still together are you?"

I nod, affirmatively.

"And Thanos is dead."

From his tone I cannot tell if his words are a statement or a question but decide to answer anyway.

"No. Both of your sons still live."

My answer seems to puzzle him. I explain how the battle between Morgan and Thanos was interrupted by Thanos' siblings from Bright and how he used the confusion to get into the Trump Fortress. Brand actually appears distressed.

"Thanos is mad. He must be stopped," I explain.

"He'll not be stopped by idealistic young boys," he sneers. "If he's gained control of my fortress then not even Morgan has the power necessary to stop him."

I tell Brand that there must be some secret ways into the Trump Fortress. He agrees but declines to tell me what they are.

"If Thanos is the menace you claim he is why won't you help us stop him?"

"The control of the Trump Fortress is a private matter between my sons only."

"But what of your third son, the mystery one. If you would tell me who he is he might be convinced to combine powers with Morgan and drive Thanos out of the Fortress?"

Brand's face breaks into a broad cheshire smile, "Do you have a Trump of me?"

I nod.

"Take it out."

I do so.

"Who do you see?"

I describe the image to him, "a well proportioned individual dressed in green and riding on a white horse. He has a handsome face with a pleasant smile, unruly red locks, and penetrating green eyes."

"See any resemblance?"

"You look a lot like Fi."

"And?"

"A bit like Bleys."

"And?"

"Christ Jesus, Brand! I don't have time to be playing twenty Bloody questions. Nor am I in the mood!"

"That's right, you have the entire multi-verse to put to right don't you? I'd almost forgotten," he coyly explains.

My anger flares again. He sees it immediately and gives me a hauntingly familiar disarming smile and says, "Take a minute out from saving the world and indulge a turtle, oh-kay?"

I give him a 'well get on with it' look.

He grins and says, "Now take out a Trump of yourself. Do you have a recent one?"

I nod. 'Tis a self-portrait but I don't tell him that.

"Who do you see?"

I don't think I like where this is going but I have agreed to play his Bloody game. "A well proportioned individual, dressed in green trimmed in gold and riding on a winged white horse, he has a handsome face with a pleasant smile, wavy red-gold hair, and penetrating green eyes.

"What exactly are you driving at?" I ask in a voice cold enough to freeze water.

"I think you already know," he smirks.

"You Bloody Bastard! Me fa'er is Random and me ma'er is Maureen Estevéz!"

"An extraordinarily beautiful woman your mother, smooth soft tawny brown skin, wavy black hair, gorgeous green eyes, and the sweetest voice this side of..."

"You Bloody Fuck!" I scream while cutting him off by slamming my doubled-up fists onto his carapace with all my strength. I don't know if the cracking I heard came from the bones in my hands or his shell. But I do know that he was screaming in pain and that I was not. The denizens of this Hell seem especially susceptible to pain so it is difficult to tell if you've really hurt one badly or not. I hope it hurts, I intended it to hurt!

"You're a liar Brand, by your own admission but, By the Unicorn, you're going to answer my questions with the truth and you're going to answer them, now!" I demand in a deadly calm voice.

"Go to Blazes! I'd say go to Hell but you're already here!" His refusal is followed by snickering which seems to echo out all the orifices of the giant shell.

I smile and squat down beside the shell, work my fingers underneath, then heft it, using my legs to do most of the actual lifting. It must weigh about half-a-ton, but I've lifted heavier free weights, the only problem is getting beneath the weight so I can balance it.

"Wh... wha... wh-hat are you doing?" Brand wails from inside his armored shell. "You swore you wouldn't hurt me!"

"I swore I wouldn't cut your Bloody head off! Besides I'm not going to hurt you. I'm merely going to turn you over on your back and leave you out in the sun to rot. I'm sure you'll regenerate at night all the parts that get cooked in the daytime. Though I imagine the burnt smell will get pretty strong after a week or two.

"NOOooooo PAH-lleeease..."

I cut his imploring wails off with, "Then answer my questions, now! With straight answers, I've neither the time nor the inclination for riddles!"

"Yes. Yeessss. In-nay-thing..."

"How do I find Morgan?"

"Follow Reaper."

"How do I get out of here, The Land of the Dead that is."

"Reaper is your guide, only he can lead you out."

"How do I get into the Trump Fortress?"

He explains a secret way in. I'll not repeat it here.

"How do I stop Thanos?"

"Kill Morgan."

"'Tis Thanos I want, not Morgan," I explain while letting him slip a little to emphasize the point.

"NOOooo! Ah, ah, iiif... if Thanos is master of my Trump Fortress then there is not enough power in Amber and Bright combined to stop him. The

best thing you could do is to swear an Oath of Fealty to him and hope he lets you live."

I laugh in his face. "Would any son of yours humble himself in such a manner, especially before another?"

"No," he answers in a very calm voice.

"Who is my father?"

"Ask yourself or, better yet, ask your lovely mother?" the words are full of bile and venom as he spits them out.

"Fucking Bastard!" I swear and drop him. He lands with a loud thud that I hope hurts like hell. I turn my back on him and stalk off, not caring in which direction so long as it is away from that Bloody turtle.

As I lengthen my strides he calls to me, "They'll stop you, you know."

I do an about-face by spinning on heel and toe and demand, "Who?"

"Them," he answers while pointing up into the sky, "they hate me, you know." As he speaks his face transforms into Corwin then Random.

I grit my teeth, my anger barely in control. I've already lopped the head off one shaper since I've been here and Brand has made me as angry as I've ever been. Not angry enough to break a vow swore on the Unicorn, though.

I contain my anger but just barely. Held in check it begins to fade and recede and I realize that Brand, if indeed the thing I just spoke to was Brand, is quite mad and very pathetic. I shake my head as I walk away. What a waste of a mind. As I move out of ear shot I can still hear him ranting and raving about *them*.

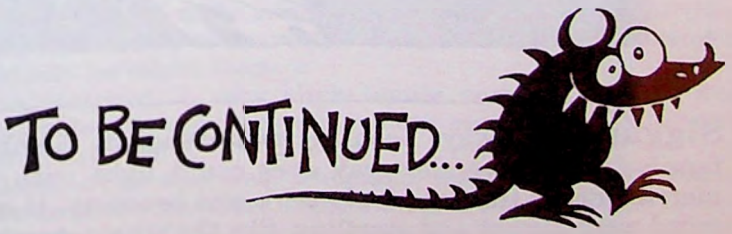
After walking a short distance I find myself in the fog again. After only a few steps I lose all sense of direction. I call out to Reaper.

A voice answers, "Over here!"

If I wasn't so agitated over Brand's lies I'm sure I would have noticed that it wasn't Reaper's usual hoarse raspy whisper. I walk toward the voice expecting to find Reaper.

"It is vain for the coward to fly, death follows close behind; it is by defying it that the brave escape."

— Voltaire



Siggan had always been the most religious member of the family... Her lavender-grey eyes could light with fervor or merriment, or turn suddenly dark and brooding. Her shifts of mood were abrupt and startling, like the single streak of white in her dark-auburn hair.

Siggan and Stormbringer On Their Own

By Cathy Klessig

(An Amber Log, Based on a Scenario by Erick Wujcik)

"In the long run, of course, there's no way I can protect you. Not from as many enemies as *you've* got."

There was something about Niemand, that seemed to make his words more impressive. Maybe it was the white hair... odd, when he didn't look a day over thirty, but rather distinguished. Or maybe it was the fact that, no matter what happened, he was always perfectly calm.

Of course, he was a Lord of Chaos. He might just as well be three thousand as thirty.

"You can all stay here for a while," Niemand continued, gesturing around at the green lawn and the peaceful grey-stone manor house. It was a country retreat he maintained, in Shadow. "And you, T'Pring, or any of you kids, are welcome to stay indefinitely. But Morgan, Carolan, and Harlan will have to move on soon."

Morgan, Carolan, and Harlan accepted Niemand's words without protest. They were Amberites, and had learned to take life without artificial sweeteners.

Morgan's mate, T'Pring the she-wolf, gave a low growl and edged a little closer to Morgan. She didn't bother to project a psychic refusal of Niemand's offer. Morgan was her mate; while he lived, there was no way she'd ever leave him.

Morgan and T'Pring's six children—from hulking Thufir down to slim, dark Stormbringer—all frowned and shook their heads, or muttered excuses, or simply stood mute. T'Pring had given birth to them, her first litter, only twenty-four years ago. None of them showed an inclination to leave the Pack and follow a stranger, however kindly he might seem.

Morgan watched, a very slight smile curving his lips and lighting his pale-blue eyes. 'Try and suborn *my* followers, will you?' he seemed to say. 'Ha!'

But aloud, all he said was, "Niemand, may I borrow a room of your house for a few minutes? There's a bit of magic I'd like to try, but it takes privacy."

"Sure," Niemand agreed easily. If he felt that Morgan had just

scored a point on him, he certainly didn't show it. "Come with me."

He and Morgan went into the house. The others talked together quietly, but no one came up with a brilliant way of solving their problems.

After a few minutes, Niemand and Morgan returned. Or at least, so it seemed. But as soon as Morgan came close, he leveled the energy rifle he always carried, and shot Carolan. Then, when several of the kids tried to tackle and disarm him, Morgan vanished.

Carolan lay on the bright green grass, charred and blackened almost beyond recognition. Morwena fell to her knees beside him, and quickly brought up the Pattern to examine him. He was barely alive, and seemed to be... unraveling... as she watched. She couldn't put it more clearly than that.

She placed Carolan at the center of her Pattern, and tried to use its power to reinforce his essence. The energy rifle had brought chaos—if not Chaos—to Carolan physical form. Perhaps a shot of the Pattern would counteract it.

It seemed to work, to some degree. The unraveling stopped. Carolan stopped dying. But she couldn't heal him.

Then, quite gently but with terrible power, another force impinged on Carolan. Morwena looked up, and there was Niemand. He was doing something, at once friendly to Carolan and grossly inimical to the Pattern. Something from Chaos.

"Let go now, Morwena," Niemand said quietly. "Let me try."

She was torn. But *she* couldn't heal Carolan. And there was no feeling of falsehood or enmity about Niemand.

So she let go.

She couldn't follow what Niemand did. But almost at once, Carolan's burned body started to heal, incredibly fast. In a few minutes he stirred and sat up, groggy but whole.

"Thank you," Morwena said to Niemand, ashamed of doubting him. He smiled at her.

While Niemand, Morwena and Carolan had been busy, the others had tried to determine what had happened. Morgunt—whose Pattern skills were quite impressive—had discovered that the 'Morgan' with the energy rifle had not been Morgan at all. It was really Solem, an enemy of Carolan's. Apparently, Solem had taken the real Morgan away, assumed his form, and used the deception to get close enough to shoot Carolan.

Next, Morgunt had managed to trace Morgan to the place where Solem had taken him. So, Morgunt had taken Thufir—who was the kind of fighter you'd naturally take along, if you were invading what might be Solem's personal space—and had tried to follow. They had

both vanished.

Morwena tried to find Morgan, too, but she couldn't. Whatever traces Morgunt had detected must have faded away.

So, they all milled around on the grass, arguing about what to do. Some wanted to flee, now that the area had been proved unsafe. But others argued that it was impossible to leave, with Morgan and Thufir and Morgunt missing. Morgunt had the manners and morals of a snake, and Thufir was a bully. But they'd gone to rescue Morgan, and the group would willingly have backed them up if they could have figured out a way to do it.

Carolan thanked Morwena and Niemand for saving his life. He asked the whole group to spread the story that Solem's attack had succeeded. "I'm likely to live a lot longer, if certain people think I'm already dead," he said wryly. Everyone agreed.

Fortunately, after a couple of minutes Morgan appeared, with both Morgunt and Thufir. Morwena did a quick mind-scan on all three of them, to be sure they were genuine. They were. There was a general happy-reunion scene. Morgan agreed it was a good idea to give out the "news" of Carolan's "death".

The party spent the rest of the afternoon relaxing, on the grounds of Niemand's house. Morwena wanted to move on at once, but Morgan said the place ought to be safe for at least a little while. Niemand's servants brought refreshments. These servants were humans, and they served Niemand quite willingly. In fact they seemed to like him; he was a popular Pack Leader on his own ground.

The older members of the group held an extended discussion of possible destinations. Again, Morgan's children had little to contribute. Morwena suggested trying to steal the Jewel of Judgment from Deirdre, and make a universe as a hiding place. But Morgan said there were problems with that plan, and they wouldn't try it just yet.

During the afternoon, Carolan came up with an idea involving shape-changing through Trumps, as applied to T'Pring. She couldn't change her shape at all: she was a wolf, first, last, and all the time. But Carolan gave her, as a present, this method of becoming human, to make it easier for her to travel with her family. He said that intelligent wolves weren't nearly as common in the Universe as intelligent humans. In human shape, T'Pring would be both less conspicuous, and less likely to arouse anger and fear in humans.

She consented to become human, as long as there was no chance of her getting stuck that way permanently. Carolan said, no, he could always just cancel it. So they tried it, and it worked beautifully.

T'Pring made a lovely human, with soft brown hair and a ready smile.

During the changing of T'Pring, Morwena happened to notice Siggan walking off toward the edge of the lawn. So, Morwena followed.

"Siggan," she called as she came near. "Let's all stay here in plain sight, okay?"

"I'm not going anywhere," Siggan replied. "I just want to pray. I need to be alone."

Siggan had always been the most religious member of the family: she knew all the tales and songs about the Old Gods. She had always been a creature of strong passions. Her lavender-grey eyes could light with fervor or merriment, or turn suddenly dark and brooding. Her shifts of mood were abrupt and startling, like the single streak of white in her dark-auburn hair.

Morwena, on the other hand, was taller, with a pale, scupted face and hair the color of fresh cream. She had spent a lot of her life studying the Pattern, and very little time in prayer. She had nothing in particular *against* religion... but when trouble came she'd rather have the Pattern up.

So, Morwena gave her sister a wistful little smile. "I hope you find some peace of soul," she said. "We could all use some, right now." And she turned to walk back to the family group.

"Morwena," said Siggan. "Wait."

"What is it?"

"How do you feel about running away from Amber?" Siggan's eyes were hard, as she studied Morwena's reaction.

Morwena's feelings about Amber flooded through her in a confused, painful tangle. "Sad. Angry. I was only there for about an hour, but I love it. And now I can never go back."

"That's what they want you to think," Siggan replied, her voice low and harsh with emotion. "Random, and all his people. We shouldn't let them do this to us. We should go back, and kill them all, and take Amber."

Morwena started. "We should *what*? Sig, don't we have enough enemies already?"

"We could take them," Siggan insisted fiercely. "Do it one or two at a time, when they're not expecting it. Walk in when they're weak and disorganized. *Force* them to accept us. Anything's better than just tamely walking out."

Morwena shook her head. She couldn't believe she was hearing this. "In the first place, I don't believe we can do it," she said. "There are too many people we'd have to kill, and we're too few, and mostly

too inexperienced."

"That can change," Siggan answered. "It will require dedication. Who knows how great your own powers of the mind will become in time, Morwena? I agree, it can't be done *now*, but this is the time to start preparing."

"And, in the second place," Morwena continued without answering Siggan's objection, "I don't want to weaken Amber, or make her vulnerable to her enemies. That would surely happen, if we did what you suggest. Amber is the seat of the Pattern. The people who hold Amber now aren't friends of ours, but they *are* committed to defending the Pattern. And I want the Pattern defended. So I'm going to leave Random right where he is, thank you. I don't like this idea of yours, and I don't want anything to do with it. It's crazy. Please, Sig, give it up."

"I thought you cared about our honor," Siggan said bitterly. "No matter what the risk, even to Amber itself, it's wrong to run away!"

Morwena stared into Siggan's eyes, her mouth a straight, hard line. "I didn't hear what you just said," she answered levelly. "And I advise you not to repeat it. I'd hate to hear anything from you that made it necessary for us to fight. This isn't a time for fighting among the family."

It occurred to Siggan suddenly, how much Morwena resembled Morgan. That ice-blue stare... Morwena had never looked at Siggan like that before.

Violence hung in the air between them for a long moment. But then, Siggan looked away. To fight with Morwena now would serve no purpose.

"Think about what I've said, Morwena," she said softly. "It's not an attack on Amber itself: just on the people in power there. It's been done before, and Amber still stands. Think about it."

"I'll leave you to your prayers," Morwena answered curtly. "By all means, put in a word to the Gods for us. But don't bother to pray that I'll fall in with your schemes. There's just no way."

With that, Morwena turned and strode back toward the others.

Siggan sat down on the grass near the edge of the woods, and began to compose her mind for prayer.

As Morwena neared the rest of the family, she saw that yet more trouble had developed in her absence. Morgan was faced off against Morgunt. Morgunt had Morgan's war-ax, which Morgan had assigned him, years ago, to carry. Morgunt held the weapon close to his body, and gripped it firmly with both hands, as if to keep it from being snatched away.

"Give me the ax, Morgunt," Morgan ordered.

"You said I could carry it," Morgunt said, his voice hard and stubborn. The two of them looked a lot alike, squared off that way.

Morgan shook his head. "I think there are forces at work here that could endanger you," he said. "It's better if you give it to me. Now."

"No."

"Do it, Morgunt. I'm giving you an order."

"*No.*"

Morgan's hands moved, and he said a Word. Morgunt started to shiver, as if with bitter cold.

"Give me the ax, Morgunt," Morgan said again. His sharp, pale face was cold and forbidding as a glacier. The rest of his children watched, fascinated. None of them—except perhaps Thufir—liked Morgunt. But, if Morgan could threaten one child... why not another? Why not any of them?

Morgunt's shivering grew worse. His lips turned blue, and he was very pale. There was a noticeable lessening of life-force around him, for those equipped to notice.

If the cold that gripped him continued, he would die.

But he was crazy-stubborn. He wouldn't give in, apologize, surrender the ax. With his last strength, he crawled to T'Pring, and collapsed at her feet.

She looked reproachfully at Morgan.

Morgan sighed, and motioned with his hands. Morgunt's life-force stopped dwindling.

Suddenly, the ax vanished from Morgunt's hands.

Morgan went to Morgunt, and turned him over. Already, there was a little color in Morgunt's face.

"What did you do with the ax, Morgunt?" Morgan asked, with soft menace.

"I d-d-didn't," Morgunt answered, through chattering teeth.

"Why don't we build a fire, and put Morgunt's feet in it?" Morwena suggested. "It'll warm him up, and maybe he'll change his story."

Morwena and Morgunt were always called the twins, because they looked so much alike. There was a family legend that they'd come out of the womb together... trying to bite one another. A recent clash between them, outside the Pattern room in Amber, had not helped matters a bit.

Morgan just shook his head at Morwena's suggestion. "He's probably telling the truth."

"Then let *me* try to find the ax," Morwena offered. "My Pattern-skills are as good as Morgunt's. I'll search for it, and I'll go after it, on one condition. If I find it and bring it back, I get to carry it."

Morgan shook his head again. "Let it go. It's probably more trouble than it's worth. I don't want to lose you."

Morgunt recovered quickly, but remained very quiet. Morgan took him aside for a long, private talk. After that, they appeared to be reconciled, more or less. But Morgunt found very little to say for a while.

After all the family business was out of the way, Niemand made a suggestion. He said he knew another Lord of Chaos, named Mandor, who could be trusted, and who was very clever. Why not consult Mandor, and see if he could think of some plan?

Morgan approved of this idea. But before Niemand could act to summon Mandor, Siggan came striding back into the group. She held herself very straight, and there was an exalted light in her eyes.

"I have seen the God Thor!" she announced. "He revealed Himself to me in a vision. He loves us. He asks us to trust Him, and He bids us obey Him."

"What did He say?" Morgan asked suspiciously.

"The God orders us to abandon Amber, and all its works and all its ways," Siggan answered solemnly. "We must not practice their customs. We must not use their powers. We must not be tied to them in any way. We must return to the Old Ways, and live as the Gods intended."

Morwena blinked, at this total about-face from Siggan's earlier attitude. Could it have come from Siggan's own mind, to enable her to back down from her crazy plan without loss of face? Or, had some outside force really suggested it to her? And *what* force?

"Wait a minute," Morgan protested. "I don't know about the rest of you, but I think the stories of the Old Gods were probably inspired by the doings of the Lords of Chaos, and maybe some of the Lords of Amber. We've already met Azeroth, and he's not a God. He's a Lord, but basically no different from Niemand here. Or from *us*. This could be somebody trying to trick us."

"It *was* a God, Father," Siggan said, her eyes shining. "It was Thor Himself. I felt His aura of power and love enfolding me. He wants the best for us. Obey Him... please. If we don't obey the Gods, we'll surely be destroyed."

"Look at what he wants us to do," Morgan argued. "We'd have to send Harlan and Carolan away. We'd have to give up most of our powers, and all our tools that relate in any way to the Pattern. That's what Thor told you to do, isn't it?"

Siggan nodded eagerly.

Morgan shook his head. "In that state, we'd be almost helpless.

It's strange to me that this vision commands something that would make our enemies very happy."

Siggan's face fell. "The Gods will protect us, if we obey Them," she pleaded. "Just as They'll punish us, if we don't."

"I'm sorry, Siggan," Morgan said firmly. "I'm not going to do this thing."

Siggan bowed her head. She was trembling. Whatever she had seen, it was terribly real to *her*.

"Thor warned me that each of you must choose," she said. "If any of you continue to practice Amber's ways... then all who believe the vision must separate themselves from those who disobey."

She looked up. Her eyes searched each of her family in turn.

T'Pring stepped forward, standing proudly in her new human form. "I will stay with my mate," she said firmly.

"And I will stay with my Pack Leader," declared Thufir in a ringing voice.

"And I!" cried most of the kids, almost in chorus.

"Wait!" cried Stormbringer. "We can't disobey the Gods."

"That wasn't a God," Morgan insisted.

"Well, I believe Siggan," said Stormbringer. "You all know she's close to the Gods. I think she's telling the truth."

"You mean, she's saying what she *believes* is the truth," Morgan corrected gently. "There's a difference."

"I'm staying with Siggan, anyway," Storm insisted.

Morgan sighed. "All right, son. And you too, Siggan. If you feel you have to stay, I won't try to force you. Maybe you'll be safer here, anyway."

Morgan looked at Niemand. "Are you willing to shelter them?" he asked formally.

"I am," Niemand answered gravely. He turned to Siggan and Storm. "Will you accept my protection?"

"Yes, and thank you," said Siggan. She sounded eager, and admiring of Niemand. Morwena wondered sourly whether Siggan was now going to develop a hero-worship for Lords of Chaos, to fill the vacuum left in her soul by this sudden Amberectomy. It would be especially easy, since so many of them had the names of Gods... or perhaps, as Morgan had suggested, it was the other way around.

Stormbringer also agreed to stay with Niemand.

"So be it," said Morgan, with the finality of a Pack Leader's decision. "Now, Niemand, as for the rest of us... would you please call in Mandor, as you suggested earlier?"

Siggan's eyes widened at this. Mandor was the name of another of the Gods, and she found this very confusing.

Niemand called Mandor, and Mandor came. Like Niemand, he was tall, with white hair, and he felt... steady. As if nothing

bothered him very much.

As Niemand had suggested, Mandor came up with an idea. He said there was a place called The Edge, which was very difficult to get to. Morgan's Pack might be safe there, if they didn't call attention to themselves by using the Pattern. Mandor could send them there, and was willing to do so.

Morgan decided to follow Mandor's advice, and Mandor made preparations to send the Pack to The Edge. Everyone who was leaving sadly said farewell to Siggan and Stormbringer, and thanked Niemand for his help.

Then Siggan, Stormbringer and Niemand withdrew from the group, and stood watching, as Mandor began his spell preparations. The last the Pack saw of that place was the four of them, standing on the grass in the sunshine, against the comfortable bulk of Niemand's house.

Morwena wanted to pray that they'd be safe. But she wasn't sure who would hear.

After the others had left, Niemand took Siggan and Storm inside and made them welcome. The house was even more comfortable than it looked from the outside. Niemand ushered them into a pleasant sitting room, and got them each a drink.

There was some discussion of future prospects. Did Random's sentence of outlawry apply to Siggan and Storm, now that they had separated themselves from the Pack? Would any of Morgan's enemies care about such legal niceties?

"Don't worry," Niemand told them. "You're under my personal protection."

But at the same time, he seemed preoccupied. After only a few minutes, he suddenly excused himself. "I have some things to take care of," he said. "Consider yourselves at home, but please stay here until I return. You should be quite safe."

Siggan was standing at a window, staring out at the happy, unarmed people strolling the paths of Niemand's estate. Without turning, she politely bade Niemand farewell. Her thoughts were elsewhere; she had been half-sad and half-exalted, ever since her vision of Thor.

As for Storm, he was bright-eyed and eager as ever. He also said a polite goodbye to Niemand. But as soon as Niemand was out of the room, he turned eagerly to Siggan.

"Hey, Sis, let's go out and explore!"

"Okay," Siggan agreed, coming back from her private distance. And she followed him out of the house.

Outside, Niemand's people strolled, or hurried cheerfully, or

danced. They wore various styles; many had musical instruments; some carried small computers. None of them spoke to Siggan or Stormbringer. All were in pursuit of their own private business.

Storm looked around eagerly, stroking his chin. "What we ought to do, is find a library. I'll bet there's a town nearby, that would have one."

"All right," Siggan answered carelessly.

So they set out, and walked along a pleasant forest path. But it quickly became less pleasant. The forest grew deeper and darker. There were no birds or animals.

Alarmed, the two wolflings turned back. But the path did not return to Niemand's house. In fact, it seemed to have bent in on itself, and become a circle, connected to nothing. The woods remained deep, dark, and deserted.

"We're trapped," Storm said finally, staring around at the silent vista of trees.

"I know this kind of trap," said Siggan. "This is a Trump trap."

Storm's eyebrows shot up. "Are you sure?"

Siggan nodded. "I've been in one before. Not this same one, though."

Storm frowned. "The question is, whose Trump trap is it?"

"I don't know," Siggan admitted, very soberly.

They joined their minds, and probed the walls of the trap. They searched for Niemand, and for various members of the Pack, but found nothing.

Finally, they made contact with a mind that was reaching back toward them.

It was Caine.

He smiled at them, mockingly and with great satisfaction. They could see him, as if through a slightly-misted window. He stood in a stone-walled room. Behind him was a table, with a scattered spread of other cards: Siggan, Stormbringer, Morwena, and other places and things.

"Siggan," he said, catching her glance with his dark eyes, "are you a favorite of your father's?"

Siggan shrugged. "He loves me."

Storm chimed in, "He loves all of us. But Thufir is his favorite."

"Oh, really?" Caine's brows raised with interest. "And what about you?"

Storm shrugged. "It doesn't matter."

"Why doesn't it?"

"Because what you want is Carolan, and Carolan's dead. Solem killed him."

At this bit of news Caine suddenly screamed with rage and cut the contact. Siggan and Storm looked at each other in some alarm.

"I wonder what he'll do now?" Siggan asked, a little shakily. "I mean, surely he won't leave us in here to starve, or something?"

"Of course not," Storm answered. "He went to a lot of trouble to capture us." But his confident tone sounded a little forced.

They tried to recontact Caine, but they couldn't. They couldn't reach anyone else, either.

"What about those other Trumps on the table?" Siggan suggested finally. "We know they're near to us, even if we can't feel them."

"Okay," Storm agreed. And they tried, with all the mental strength they could muster.

Finally, Siggan got a vague contact with her own Trump. With great difficulty, she managed to pull herself and Storm through the card.

They had escaped the trap, which they could now see as an oversized Trump, fully nine feet tall, hanging on a wall near the table. They recognized it, from the familiar loop of path and the gloomy trees.

Five more oversized Trumps hung in the room. Smaller Trumps littered the central table. There were a couple of chairs. But, most disappointingly, the room had no doors or windows. They could see no exits at all.

"Dad said that Caine was using Brand's old Trump-fortress," Storm mused. "This must be part of it."

"That makes sense," Siggan agreed. "But I don't want to explore it. I'd rather get out of here."

"Sounds good to me. But how?"

"The Trumps?"

They looked around, at the large Trumps on the walls.

One was the trap they'd already been in: a dead end.

The next Trump showed Amber, where Siggan and Storm might or might not still be under sentence of death. Without a word, they passed it by and moved on.

"Where's that place, Sis?" Storm asked, looking at the third picture.

"That's Bright," she answered. "I recognize it from Dad's mind."

"Oh, yeah," he agreed. "Bright. Where Solem comes from."

Again they moved on.

Next was a dark, outdoor landscape. It was hard to make out, but it certainly didn't look inviting.

Then came a Trump that was simply a mirror. Neither of them had any idea what it might do.

Finally, there was a Trump that pictured a rocky plain with a gash in it, covered by a strange, dark sky.

"Is that the Abyss?" Storm ventured. "The place where the dragon rises up, that eats realities?"

Siggan looked dubious. "I think so. I sure don't want to try it. But we've got to try *some* card or other."

Finally, they chose the dark landscape. At least, they weren't *sure* it was bad. They'd have to take their chances.

Siggan picked up the small Trumps Caine had left on the table. She and Storm went to stand before the strange, dark Trump on the wall. Together, they concentrated on it. It was very sensitive: it activated almost before they began the attempt.

They were on a bare rock, in the middle of a rushing river, just above a thundering falls. Around them, people were floating down the river. The people screamed, whenever they could grab enough air. Hands kept scrabbling at Siggan and Storm's rock, but the people were always carried away by the current before they could get a good grip.

"Storm!" Siggan screamed. "We've come to the wrong place, big time! This looks like the Land of the Dead!"

Storm turned pale, and no wonder. Morgan and Carolan and Harlan had told terrible stories about their adventures in the Land of the Dead. Wherever they'd gone, in that place, there were people being tortured.

"Hang on!" Storm yelled, over the roar of the falls and the screams of the people. "I'm gonna change into hawk form, and see where there's a better place to land!"

Siggan nodded, and watched as her brother pulled off his clothes and began the change. It seemed to take an unusually long time. And, when he finally finished, his hawk-self seemed to have lost interest in his original project. He flew away in an apparently random direction, despite Siggan's calling to him.

Siggan tried to catch her brother psychically, and bring him back. But when she opened herself, she could hear only the pervasive agony from the desperate people in the river. She continued her attempts, but passed out from the intense pain.

Unconscious, she could not feel her hands losing their grip on the slippery rock.

Storm flew for a long time. The landscape kept changing, and he couldn't get his bearings. But somehow, it didn't seem to matter.

Finally, he landed in a misty region by a high cliff. A woman was chained to a rock at the cliff's base. Her face was contorted with pain.

Taking human shape, Storm found a loose rock and bashed at the woman's shackles. He managed to free one of her wrists. She was mumbling incoherently.

Using both hands, she began to strain at the chain on her other wrist. It broke. She was still mumbling, and Storm couldn't attract her attention.

He decided that discretion lay in climbing the nearby cliff. There was something very spooky about the woman, and the whole situation. The sound of chains snapping urged him to his best climbing speed.

From a respectable height, he looked back. The woman was

standing up, tearing the remains of shackles from her limbs. Her face was no longer contorted with pain, and Storm recognized her as Nara, Harlan's mother. She was there in the Land of the Dead because Morgan had killed her.

Stormbringer felt it prudent to avoid Nara's attention. He remained still, clinging to the rocky cliff face, while she looked around. Finally she chose a direction and walked away, vanishing into the mist.

Storm decided to keep climbing the cliff. He climbed for a very long time. At last, just when he thought he could see the top, some men in armor leaned over the edge above him, and called out: "Are you coming to join the army against the Incarnate?"

"Sure, I could use a job," Storm shouted back.

The men threw him a rope, and helped him to the top of the cliff. When he arrived, and got a close look at them, he could see that they were zombies. But they seemed friendly, and his sojourn in the Land of the Dead had already made Storm less picky about his company than normally.

"Welcome to the army of Jaeger," they said. A chill went up Storm's spine: Jaeger was Harlan's father, but father and son were not on good terms.

Jaeger's men offered Stormbringer chain armor, without any padding. They themselves wore similar, unpadded armor, and didn't seem to mind. But then, they were all dead, so maybe they didn't care.

The horse they offered Storm was also dead, though quite lively. He put on the armor and accepted the horse with apparent pleasure, not wishing to make the dead soldiers suspicious.

One of the soldiers peered at Storm, and said, "Say, you're alive, aren't you?"

"Last time I checked."

"Don't you think the commander should know about this?"

"No, I don't think we should bother him."

The dead soldier was doubtful at first, but allowed Storm to persuade him. Perhaps he did not wish to appear prejudiced against his new comrade, just because Storm was alive.

Shortly, orders were passed, and the whole army mounted its dead horses and moved off. As an experiment, Storm scratched the back of his own hand with his dagger. The wound was far more painful than its size would indicate. But it healed in a matter of seconds.

Jaeger's army rode into a long, dark tunnel, carrying Storm along with it.

Siggan lay on her back, on dry ground. Something was licking her face. She batted at it; it returned. She opened her eyes.

She stared into the eyes of a large wolf. She knew him: Siggan the Trickster. He had disappeared from the Pack Ground before Siggan and her littermates had been born. But T'Pring had often shown Siggan psychic images of the good friend for whom Siggan had been named. Strange to have the same name... she decided to call him "Uncle."

"Hello, Uncle," she said to him. "You must have saved my life. Thank you. Can you help me get out of this terrible place?"

He looked at her with love, but didn't answer. She saw the problem at once: he was a pure-bred wolf. He couldn't take human shape, to speak to her. If they were on the Pack Ground, they would 'speak' psychically. She shuddered: she wasn't about to try *that* again.

There could be little doubt that she was, indeed, in the Land of the Dead. The endless people in agony, the psychic pain when she'd opened her mind: it all jibed too well with Morgan's descriptions.

Siggan sat up and looked around. She and Uncle were on a small island, in what looked like the same dark river. Around them, the howling dead streamed past. Only shrubs and coarse grass grew on the island, but it looked wonderful compared to the barren rock above the falls.

The falls? She couldn't see or hear them. Where was she? Lost. In the Land of the Dead.

To keep from panicking, Siggan checked her gear. Everything was soaking wet, but nothing was missing. 'Good,' she thought, 'then we have clean water, and food.'

She took out some meat, to offer it to Uncle. It was crawling with worms. *All* the food was crawling with worms, and rotten.

Gagging, she threw the food away from her, into the river. The dead in the river thrashed and fought over it. Siggan struggled with an impulse to scream.

"Uncle, how can we get *out* of here?" she demanded. "There must be some way."

His answer was to get up and walk away from the river.

Siggan followed. Strange -- where was the other bank? She had seen it clearly before, but it was gone. They were walking uphill, through a forest. Already, they'd gone much farther than the width of the small island. She could still hear people screaming, but the sound of the river was gone.

She looked back: no river. It was gone. She looked up: the trees were full of people, hanging from hooks. Hence the screaming.

"Uncle. Wait. Are these bad people?"

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"Uncle. Wait. Are these bad people?"

He turned and looked at her, thoughtfully.

'Stick to yes or no questions,' she thought. 'And never mind the fine points of philosophy.'

"Would these people be our allies, if we freed them?" she tried again.

Uncle shook his head: no.

They continued through the wood of hanging trees. Siggan gave thanks to the wolf-Gods for her escapes, from Caine and from the river.

They came to the edge of the wood, and out onto a plain studded with strangely twisted rocks. Like the river, the wood of hanging trees vanished as soon as they left it. Now the rocky plain extended as far as Siggan could see. There was a welcome silence.

"Uncle, are those really just rocks?"

No.

Uh-oh. "Will they try to eat us?"

No.

He trotted out between the rocks. She followed. They loped for a long time, in the pace used by wolves for traveling.

Something howled, and darted from behind a rock. Human head, lion's paws, snake's body. Siggan drew her sword, but the thing ran past. After it came a pursuer: spider's legs and head, body of a woman. It also ran past.

Then a man leaped into view. He was naked, but carried a machine gun. "Leave it alone!" he screamed at the woman/spider.

Siggan knew him: Thanos, son of Brand of Amber. He had been killed, in the course of the events that had led to Morgan and Carolan and Harlan being outlawed.

Siggan edged toward the nearest rock. If Thanos would just keep staring after the woman/spider for a few seconds, Siggan would be out of his... Thanos turned and stared at Siggan. "Where's Brand?" he demanded sharply.

"How should *I* know?" Siggan answered truthfully, startled. She had heard that Brand was dead. So he could be in the river, or strung up in the wood of hanging trees. He could be anywhere -- and who'd want to find him, anyway?

Thanos, apparently. He glared at Siggan. His mouth kept assuming new expressions, none of which were calm. Suddenly he swung the gun barrel towards Siggan.

"Where's Brand?!" he screamed.

"I don't know!" she yelled, diving for cover. She landed behind a rock. The rock had a face, which stared at her. Then a burst from Thanos' machine gun blew most of the rock apart.

She leaped and rolled to fresh cover. "Shooting me will not get you Brand!" she shouted.

Somehow, this fragment of sense got through to Thanos. He

threw his machine gun away, and himself to the ground. Wild sobs shook him. "Daddy! Daddy!" he screamed. "You were never there for me! Daddy!"

As Thanos screamed, the woman/spider and the man/lion/snake came creeping up to him. Other patchwork creatures came crawling or leaping. Some tried to lick Thanos' face, but he just kept screaming for his father.

Where was Uncle? The old wolf was nowhere to be seen. Maybe he was smart. But Siggan felt moved by Thanos's desolation. How long could *she* stay sane in this place? Would Thanos become more rational, if he were no longer alone?

Slowly, staying near cover, she approached the weeping man. She put her hand on his shoulder, gently. "Don't cry," she said. "I'll help you."

He stopped crying in mid-breath, and stared at her. "You will?"

"Yes," she said. "Come with me. Maybe we'll find Brand."

Thanos stood up, staring at Siggan. "You look a lot like Morgan," he said suspiciously. "Why is that?"

Uh-oh. "Everybody looks a little like everybody," Siggan answered. "I even look a little like you."

Thanos leaned forward and peered at her. "You do, you *do*," he said. His wonder at the marvel was childlike. He lowered his voice confidentially: "You know what *I* think? I think *you're* related to Brand, *too*."

"Half the damn world is probably related to Brand," Siggan answered impatiently.

Thanos stopped dead still, and looked around warily. Siggan could almost hear the wheels turning: *which* half? *Where?* His manner became elaborately casual and sane.

"Maybe we'd better go," he said to his patchwork creatures. He stooped, and picked up his machine gun by the barrel. Then he blew Siggan a kiss and left, almost running. The creatures followed.

Siggan snorted. So much for company making Thanos saner.

"Is he gone?" a voice asked from behind her.

She jumped and whirled around. There, peering from behind a rock, was Brand of Amber.

Brand, seeing that Thanos was indeed gone, emerged from behind his rock. His head and limbs protruded from a large turtle shell. Tears fell from his eyes; he ignored them.

"Granddaughter, how good it is to see you," Brand effused.

"Hello, Grandfather," Siggan answered. "You're crying."

"No, I'm not."

"Yes."

He seemed to notice it for the first time. "Oh. Just something in my eyes. You are Siggan, daughter of Morgan, my son."

"Can you help me get out of here?"

"Oh, yes, I will help you, because you are my blood. Where *is* Morgan?"

"I don't really know. The life he led struck me as too tame, so I left to seek adventure."

"You must not thwart your father's purpose," Brand said, very seriously. "He has bred you to bleed on the Pattern, so that you may obliterate it, and Morgan may create a newer, brighter Pattern."

Behind Brand, Uncle finally reappeared. He made little "let's go" movements, careful not to let Brand see him.

"Uh -- excuse me, Grandfather. It's been nice talking with you, but I really must leave now." Brand's last remark had rather soured Siggan on his company, anyway.

So, once again, she followed Uncle. They loped together for what seemed a very long time. Finally, they came to the edge of the plain of rocks. The next region was pocked with pits full of flame. Howls of agony came from the pits. The rocky plain vanished, like the other regions, as soon as they had left it.

Another long march; another scene change. This time a lake: much thrashing beneath the surface. A narrow path made of skulls crossed the lake in a straight bone-white line. It led, far in the distance, to a wall that went straight up, farther than Siggan could see.

She didn't really want to take that path of skulls, between those thrashing waters. But Uncle stepped casually onto the bone-white path, and kept going. After a moment, Siggan followed.

It was even further to the wall than it looked, but they finally made it. The path ended at a small, jagged hole in the looming stone wall. Uncle went to this hole, and tried to squeeze through. Siggan pushed, and helped him to scramble in.

Then it was Siggan's turn. The hole led to a tunnel, very narrow and dark, tending upward. It was so low that she had to take her pack off and crawl, pushing it up the slope ahead of her.

The tunnel was so long as to surpass all sane belief. Siggan had to crawl the whole way. 'It's even worse for Uncle,' she kept thinking. 'He's not built for this. If he can do it, I can.'

At long last, daylight. Emergence, under a sky the exact blue of the sky over Amber. Around her, Siggan saw the ancient Forest of Arden. Her heart lifted, but she was afraid to hope. Was she out of the Land of the Dead?

She opened herself psychically, just a tiny bit, to check. The reflected agony of countless souls blasted her. This time, she managed to clamp down quickly and not faint from the pain. But it meant she was still trapped.

Was there any way out? How much further? Uncle was still moving purposefully, into the trees. There seemed nothing to do but follow.

Then she heard a hunting horn.

Meanwhile, it wasn't much fun for Stormbringer, riding a bony, dead horse through a long, dark tunnel, in an army commanded by an enemy of doubtful sanity. But, to escape from the Land of the Dead, most people would probably do worse things.

Storm galloped on through the tunnel, surrounded by Jaeger's dead army. They had recruited him "to fight the Incarnate". Storm himself aside, there were probably few incarnate people in the Land of the Dead. With any luck, Jaeger would have to carry this war -- and Storm -- outside.

The air grew dusty. There was a noise, as of battle, ahead. Storm drew his sword. His neighbors had slowed to a walk, so he did, too.

The dust and noise grew worse. Storm could see only the horse ahead of him, and other horses to his left and right. There was no immediate sign of action. It seemed he would have to wait for those in front to meet the enemy, and either prevail or fall.

But waiting can be an active thing, filled with attempts to find out just what's going on.

First, he made some attempts to use Pattern-based powers. But these were fruitless. This, it seemed, was the nature of the Land of the Dead.

Then, he reasoned that a slight shape-shift, of the eyes only, might improve his sight. But, when he tried it, he found it wasn't enough. He had the distinct impression that it would take a more radical, full-body change.

It was a gamble. When he had assumed hawk-shape, before, he had also assumed the mind of a hawk. He had lost control of his actions for a time. But, what if he became something more intelligent... say, a wolf? Then he could dodge between the contestants easily.

He decided to go for it. Quickly, he slipped off his horse and started the change. But... he lost control... of it...

Consciousness. Human again. Naked. A strong, rough hand grasped his shoulder from behind, and yanked him away from... a woman?!

He couldn't see her any more; she was buried under a pile of ugly demons, each pushing and clawing to be the next to rape her. She was chained to the ground. She was screaming.

Stormbringer went berserk. The place had grabbed his mind somehow, and made him do something he never would have done, and "pissed off" was an incredible understatement. 'Enough of this bullshit, *now*.'

Demon bones crunched under his fists and feet. An enraged Amberite was completely out of their league. Soon they lay in a messy ring around the woman.

She was battered, and gashed by demon claws. But she was clearly Llewella of Amber.

There was no time to free her: the demons were getting up. They didn't seem to be damaged. They charged.

Glancing around, Storm saw that he was on a rocky mountaintop. Good. He grabbed the nearest demon and threw it over a cliff. He kept grabbing and throwing, in a kind of methodical frenzy, until they were all gone.

As soon as the mountaintop was clear, Storm seized a rock and beat at Llewella's chains. He quickly freed one of her hands, but she did nothing to help herself. Overcome by her experience, she only rolled over, moaning. So he kept bashing until she was free.

She rolled into a ball. She was healing incredibly fast. Storm leaned toward her, but stopped short of touching her. "Llewella?"

No answer. He kept talking to her, softly, one eye on the cliff edges. None of the enemy seemed to be returning. Maybe they'd finally learned.

After a while Llewella sat up, staring blankly at Storm. She was already completely healed. That must be how she'd stayed in one piece, despite the demons. But there'd also been no way for her to die and escape them: she was dead already.

Suddenly, Storm wanted very much to leave that spot. He muttered, "I have to go," and turned away.

"Wait," Llewella said.

Storm stopped and turned around. They regarded one another.

"Where are we?" Storm asked finally.

"Hell?" Llewella ventured.

"Who chained you up?"

She looked down, desolate. "Carolan," she said, as if she couldn't believe it.

Storm couldn't believe it either. It wasn't something he could imagine Carolan doing, to anybody. "Why'd he do that?"

Llewella shook her head. "I don't know. He was always my favorite. He must have gone mad."

Half to himself, Storm muttered, "I'd better warn my dad."

"Who's your dad?"

"Oh, nobody really," Storm evaded, not wanting to admit that his father was Carolan's friend.

"And who are you?"

"My name's Michael," Storm answered, resorting to outright untruth.

Llewella shook her head. "No," she replied with sudden firmness. "You're Stormbringer, and your father is Morgan."

"Well... yes. I just like to call myself Michael," he admitted lamely.

Oddly, considering all that had happened, Llewella seemed to bear him no malice. She merely looked at him for another long moment, and then said simply, "Thank you."

"Oh, sure," Storm murmured, embarrassed.

"But why were you one of the demons attacking me?"

"It's hard to explain," he said, having to work to look her in the face. "I wasn't, really. But I get screwed up every time I try to shape shift. I don't think I'd better do it anymore, here."

"Oh. You're a shape changer, like Morgan."

"Yeah."

"What do you want to do now?"

Storm remembered something Morgan had once told him about the Land of the Dead: it had a Pattern. So he answered, "If there's a Pattern here, I'd like to walk it."

Llewella nodded. She had the quality of not being surprised, no matter what Storm said to her. "I can help you find it," she offered.

"Okay. I'd be grateful."

Llewella stood up, and walked easily to the cliff's edge. She showed no stiffness from her recent injuries, and no self-consciousness from the fact that both she and Storm were naked. She simply walked, with a matter-of-fact air, to the cliff's edge at the worst possible, steepest place, and started down without pausing.

"Hey," Storm protested, following her to the edge. He meant to point out a better route, but stopped when he saw Llewella pushing at a giant boulder.

"Help me," she said.

Storm edged down the slope, and applied his strength to the rock. It was enormous: if they hadn't been trying to push it downhill,

they'd never have managed to move it. As it was, it was a good thing they were both Amberites.

But the rock finally gave way, and rolled off downhill with a series of crashes. Now, Storm could see the mouth of a tunnel. Calm as ever, Llewella climbed in. She seemed very sure of where she was going. Storm, completely lost himself, could only follow.

The tunnel was not a pleasant place. Some of the stones were faces, frozen in mid-scream. It should have been pitch dark, but somehow there was a dim, sourceless light: just enough to see the faces. Swell.

They walked for quite a distance. At last they came to a flat panel in a wall, with two holes perfectly placed for peeking. Storm accordingly peeked, and got a shock. What he saw was the throne room of Amber.

But who was that, in charge there? Jaeger? Yes, it was... Jaeger, flanked by a dozen dead guards. Some of the guards held a battered, miserable-looking man: Eric of Amber.

Eric had been dead for some time. During his life, for a short time he'd been King of Amber. Now, the guards were forcing him to kneel at Jaeger's feet. They held him tightly, in spite of his mad struggles. He seemed to know that something bad was about to happen.

Nor was he mistaken. One of the guards handed Jaeger a white-hot poker, and Jaeger plunged the glowing iron into Eric's left eye.

In life, Eric had once commanded that the same thing be done to his own brother, Corwin. Now Eric, like Corwin before him, screamed and struggled, but uselessly. Jaeger pulled out the iron, and poised it before Eric's other eye.

Storm had heard enough bad things about Eric to fill a book. Still, he hated to stand by and watch Jaeger torture him.

On the other hand, Storm and Llewella in their birthday suits were a pretty small attack force, against Jaeger and a dozen armed guards... not to mention the other guards who would doubtless come at Jaeger's call.

Fuming, Storm kept quiet.

With calm deliberation, Jaeger burned out Eric's other eye. Then he turned to leave the throne room, ordering the guards to follow. They dragged Eric away, down the hall toward the stairs that led to the dungeons.

Those were also the stairs to the Pattern room. To attempt the Pattern, Storm would have to follow Jaeger down those stairs.

Storm sighed, found the catches that held the secret panel, and opened it. On the other side, he found a portrait of Oberon, Storm's own great-grandfather. Strange, to have been looking at the throne

room through Oberon's eyes. He made sure he could open the panel from the other side, and then motioned Llewella to accompany him.

The two of them crept out into the throne room, and Storm shut the panel behind them. Silent on their bare feet, they crossed the stone floor and peeked out the door Jaeger had used. There was the hallway, and there was the head of the stairs. It was just like the real Amber, the way Storm had seen it the day he and his brothers and sisters had taken the Pattern.

An exact match... right down to the guard standing by the stairs.

The guard looked bored. He wasn't quite facing toward Storm and Llewella. 'All right,' Storm thought. 'This next move will depend on speed.'

He gathered himself, charged silently, and bashed the guard with joined fists, right below the back of the helmet. No pulling the punch: bones cracked under Storm's hands. The guard fell forward, unable to make a sound, his neck ruined. But he was still stirring.

He was trying to get up.

Frantically, Storm hit him again, and again, till the whole top of the guard's spine was splintered. It didn't make much difference: the man was still moving. He couldn't die. He was dead already.

Quickly, Storm found some cord that was holding up a tapestry. He took the guard's clothes, spear, and armor -- light armor, mostly just a breastplate -- tied up the guard, and left him in the throne room. At least there would be some time before the alarm. But it was impossible to say how *much* time. It might be important to move fast.

At the head of the staircase, Storm turned to Llewella. "You're free to go," he told her. "This could be very dangerous."

"Don't you think you might need me?" she objected.

"Yes. But you deserve to be warned."

She met his eyes very steadily. "I'll consider myself warned."

After a moment Storm nodded. He started down the stairs, and Llewella followed.

Luckily, there were no guards at the bottom of the stairs. There was some commotion from the direction of the dungeons, but no sound or movement anywhere else. Quickly and quietly, Storm and Llewella headed down the hall to the Pattern room.

No extra guards. No portcullis. The key to the Pattern room hung on a hook outside the room's door. It had been this way, once, in the real Amber. To Storm's relief, the defenses in this Land-of-the-Dead parody of Amber hadn't been upgraded like the real ones.

He let himself and Llewella into the Pattern room. Sure enough, the Pattern glowed dimly on the floor. Eagerly, Stormbringer moved to the beginning of the Pattern.

It was the second time Storm had walked the Pattern. It didn't

get any easier. But he did it.

He reached the center and looked back. Llewella had fallen to her knees on the floor. Storm could leave now. But what would happen to Llewella? And where could this Pattern take him? What options did he have?

Stormbringer paused to consider his next move carefully.

Guided by Siggan the Trickster, whom she called Uncle to avoid the confusion of their mutual name, Siggan had emerged in a part of the Land of the Dead which resembled the Forest of Arden.

In the quiet forest, came the sound of a hunting horn.

Uncle motioned, with some urgency, for Siggan to follow him. She did, and quickly. They took a convoluted pathway through the great trees and green glades of Arden.

Finally they came to a wall: to all appearance, the outer wall of Amber Castle. Siggan, like all Morgan's children, had been to Amber once, and also had been given thorough mental briefings on Amber since childhood. Uncle led her along the wall to a back door, which she recognized at once.

He scratched at the door, and looked at Siggan expectantly. She tried to open the door, but it was locked.

She put the palms of her hands against it. "Maybe if we both leaned on it, hard..." she suggested.

Uncle just looked at her.

"Well," she said, "if these folks were friendly, you'd've taken me to the front gate, wouldn't you? I'd like to avoid making noise."

He just looked at her some more.

She sighed. "Never mind. Here goes nothing."

Siggan bashed the door open with her shoulder. They went in, fast. Main corridor. No one around. Stairway at one end. Uncle led her down it.

They came to the foot of the stairs, near the dungeon area. But they didn't go that way. Instead, they made for the Pattern room, and arrived there without incident. Entering, they found Llewella, kneeling on the floor near the Pattern's beginning. Stormbringer stood at its heart.

"Storm!" Siggan was jubilant. "Where have you been? I was so worried..."

"My shape change got away from me, and then I couldn't find you," Storm explained. "But that's not important now. Walk the Pattern and join me. We can leave together."

Leave. The most beautiful word... but, to leave Uncle? He'd done so much for her...

Siggan stroked the old wolf's shaggy head. "Is there anything I

can do for you?" she asked him and Llewella.

Both of them shook their heads. Uncle looked at her with love and sadness. There was no way he could walk the Pattern, and probably no way he could leave the Land of the Dead. Siggan must return to her proper place, and he must remain here, in his.

With a lump in her throat, Siggan turned from him, and addressed herself to the Pattern.

The journey to the center was no harder than usual.

At the end of the timeless time of struggle, Siggan found herself at the center, with Storm. She gave him his belongings, which she had kept in the hope of finding him. He pulled on some clothes, and they discussed their next move.

"Let's try to reach the Primal Pattern of this place," Storm suggested. "Can you imagine what a place that must be?"

Siggan was aghast. It seemed that nothing could dampen Storm's endless curiosity and enthusiasm. Siggan wanted only to leave the Land of the Dead, for as close to forever as possible.

"What's the matter, Sis? You afraid?" Storm's voice was teasing, but gentle. The voice of her beloved baby brother, who could wheedle her into anything. But not this time.

She blew up at him. "If you had any sense, *you'd* be --"

Too late, she saw the gathering of will in Stormbringer's eyes. She plucked out her dagger, and hit him on the back of the head with the hilt.

But he vanished anyway.

She cared for Stormbringer. She really did. But there comes a time when fools must be left to their folly.

She concentrated on Niemand's country house, using the utmost precision of formulation. All Shadows, all possible Land-of-the-Dead copies, must be excluded from possibility. She must find the room where Niemand had said goodbye to her. The room where she should have said no to Storm's crazy itch to explore.

She steadied her aim. She pulled the trigger of her mind...

She was there.

Siggan stared around, dismayed. The big room, once so cheerful, was dirty, with cobwebs everywhere. There was a smell of mildew, and of old smoke. Through the window, she could see nothing of the forest but burned stumps.

Was this place really in the land of the living?

Cautiously, she tested the psychic waters. No agony of tormented souls. No feeling of any minds whatever.

Meanwhile, Storm had arrived on a plane of crystal. Embedded below him, a three-dimensional Pattern burned in lonely beauty. The Primal Pattern of the Land of the Dead.

Storm's head hurt a little. But Siggan had failed to score a solid hit with the dagger: he was all right. He bore her no malice: she was, of course, trying to prevent him from something she saw as dangerous.

'She's just too timid, that's all,' he thought. 'Now, about this Pattern...'

It seemed to be completely embedded in a single, huge crystal. Storm couldn't find an opening, to go down and walk it. He had heard that some people could walk the Pattern in their minds. He looked down, and traced the three-dimensional arcs of light, trying to 'picture-walk' it.

Nothing happened.

Suddenly, Siggan's caution didn't seem quite so silly.

'No problem,' he thought. 'I still have her Trump. Let's see where she is by now.'

He found her at Niemand's. When she saw him, she looked relieved and angry at the same time. She didn't bother to lecture him; she just pulled him through.

Niemand's place was completely deserted. They had originally been told by Niemand to stay there, and wait for his return. But it didn't look as if anyone had returned there for a long time, or was likely to. And, however they searched, they could find no food or water.

With some trepidation (at least on Siggan's part) they decided to try to walk through Shadow to Niemand. So, they set out.

Presently, cold and tired and hungry, they shaped a wayside inn, safe inside a stockade. Siggan "found" some gold, and rented a spacious, friendly room on the first floor. They also bought some horses.

Siggan's mount was black, with a white star on his forehead. He had been well-trained as a warhorse. Storm preferred a lighter, but faster horse, very sure-footed, also black, with a white blaze on his nose.

They replenished their supplies for the journey, and settled in their room to rest.

Then Storm decided to try his shape-changing abilities. He wanted to make sure they were working right again, now that he was out of the Land of the Dead.

Siggan agreed to this project, with a little misgiving.

Stormbringer... was bright-eyed and eager as ever. He also said a polite goodbye to Niemand. But as soon as Niemand was out of the room, he turned eagerly to Siggan.

"Hey, Sis, let's go out and explore!"

So, Storm changed into a hawk. The change was easy, and he retained his own mindset. All seemed to be well.

Next, he tried his wolf form. No trouble there.

Then he decided to try the demon form he had assumed, involuntarily, just before meeting Llewella.

'If I start to get crazy, knock me out,' he projected psychically to Siggan.

"Wait," she answered with alarm. "What are you..."

He didn't wait. He made the effort of change. He changed.

He turned into a winged demon, eight feet tall. This time, Siggan felt his mind change completely. He was no longer Stormbringer, her brother.

The thing reached for her with a huge, taloned hand.

Siggan hit the demon hard, on top of its bony skull, with the flat of her sword. This had no effect. She leaped backward, but the creature's talons raked her face.

Thinking quickly, Siggan decided it was probable some workman had left a sledge hammer behind the dresser. Without looking she reached... and of course it was there.

She bashed the demon on the head. The blow would have pulped the skull of a human. But on this creature, it had no effect at all.

The demon grabbed Siggan and lifted her high, scraping her against the ceiling. Its claws gouged into her side. It battered her with waves of hate and fear.

She psi-blasted it. After Morwena, she was the best in the family at that art, and she hoped it would have some effect.

It did. The demon dropped her, its hatred changing to panic. With the loss of touch, the psychic link was broken. The creature ran from Siggan, straight through the wall, without checking stride. By ill luck, that was the wall that adjoined the common room.

Siggan leaped through the wall in pursuit. People scattered, shrieking, to get out of the demon's way. One old man didn't move quickly enough. The demon broke his neck in passing.

The front door didn't slow it down, any more than the wall had. Pieces of door and doorframe flew in all directions. Outside, the demon leaped over the stockade wall and disappeared.

After a moment's thought, Siggan pulled out Stormbringer's Trump. She reached through it. The demon's mind came to her clearly: warped, hungry in strange ways. In addition to more familiar desires, it wanted... soul, or spirit... from others.

The creature was using some strange power, something completely unfamiliar to Siggan. But whatever it was doing, Siggan doubted she'd enjoy the result.

She jabbed into its mind, hard. The strange flow of power was

disrupted.

The demon looked around, confused. Its psyche was not very high by the standards of Amber; it couldn't trace her attack. It shook its head, and began to gather power again.

Siggan probed into its mind again, and rendered it unconscious.

Blackly furious, she considered what to do with it. Ideally, it should be returned to the form of Stormbringer. Could she force it to resume that shape?

Yes, she thought it was possible. It would take perhaps twenty minutes. The process would be easier, and about twice as fast, if she could work while touching it. The idea was revolting, but she brought herself through the Trump, and set to work.

The thing's unconscious psyche had a fragmented ferocity, like a thousand weasels trapped in a bag, all trying to bite her at once. She ignored the pain of their small bites, in the one fierce blaze of will. *You will be Stormbringer*!

And he was.

Mentally and physically battered, Siggan stared down at her brother. 'This is it,' she thought. 'The last time. The very, very last time I'll pull his ass out of the fire.'

She woke him. She showed him the clawmarks on her face, the gouges in her side. She told him what had happened.

He didn't want to believe what she was telling him. He had no memory of what had happened.

"I'm sorry," he said, stricken, when she finally made him believe. "I won't do it again."

Her pent-up anger and fear came bursting out. "You can't *control* it," she yelled. "Don't *ever* take that form again."

They decided to go back to the inn for their horses and gear. Siggan went into the stockade, and told the humans she'd managed to banish the demon. They were filled with fear, naturally enough. They gave her the baggage and horses, and she and Storm left quickly.

As they rode, they decided to try some experiments. Siggan brought the Pattern to her mind, and visualized Morwena. Storm lent power to the act. But there was no hint of contact. Neither could they find Rudra, or Niemand.

Finally Siggan said, "We don't have a lead on Niemand. Let's go to The Edge. At least there, we'll have a chance of meeting the family. Maybe they've heard from him."

So they set out. They had a mental picture, from their contact with Mandor, of what The Edge was like. It took them about three weeks, but they got there.

The Edge was a beach. Reality felt very strange there... as though the rules of existence were suddenly subject to change.

Siggan decided to experiment with the place. She tried to contact Degaz, one of the Old Gods, both by psyche and through prayer. No result. Psyche seemed to work normally, between her and Storm. No other minds were nearby.

Storm attempted a small magical working. That didn't work either.

By that time, Siggan was getting worried. So she tried to summon the Pattern to mind, just to be sure she still could. And it worked -- sort of. The Pattern appeared before her, but it didn't feel quite right.

She decided to try using Pattern power, and willed a bright blue-and-green rock to appear. It did.

Then *all* the rocks on the beach started turning blue-and-green.

Then the blue-and-green rocks gathered themselves into a ramp, six feet wide, up into the air over the sea. About 200 feet above the ground, the ramp disappeared into low-lying clouds.

"I'm going up there," Storm announced.

Siggan chewed her lip. "I wouldn't," she told him. "I'm through risking my life to pull you out of trouble. I'll keep Trump contact, in case you fall. But if you get into trouble, you'll handle it yourself."

"It's okay, Sis," Storm answered, with his usual breezy assurance. "I can handle it."

He trotted easily up the ramp. Siggan waited for him to come crashing down. But, to her surprise, the ramp bore his weight. She watched through the Trump contact, to see what would happen next.

There was music. Light, bouncy music. A woman, singing about how wonderful, to go downtown. "Downtown... everything's waiting for you."

The song ended. A man's voice announced another: it was called "California Dreaming".

"I'd be safe and warm, if I was in Ell-Ay," the singers complained. But their voices were wistful, rather than bitter.

'Oh, Gods, to be safe,' Siggan thought desolately.

Now, ahead of Storm, a huge arch appeared, made out of the blue-and-green stones. There were flashing blue lights on top. Contrasting red-and-yellow lights spelled out a sign on the archway:

WELCOME TO BUCHELLA
King Gerian, Prop.

Through the archway Storm could see broad streets, thronged with people of all kinds. Humans of many races, furred people,

scaled people, animals. There were no guards, and few of the crowd carried weapons. But nobody looked twice at Storm's sword. Buchella was an incredible, noisy boom town, like nothing Siggan or Stormbringer had ever seen.

It was real. It seemed to be really there.

Siggan mounted the ramp into the sky. She and Storm entered Buchella.

There was no Pattern, within the city. But there was plenty of psychic potential. The minds of the thronging, pushing people made a clamorous, dissonant music. There was a great deal of noise, and dust, and bright colors. And people, people, *people*!

Storm loved it. But Siggan discovered she did not care for crowds.

There were peddlers everywhere. One could buy food, fireworks, or almost any other commodity. Siggan bought a newspaper.

The headlines were thunderous. "GOOD TIMES IN BUCHELLA! PROSPERITY FOR ALL!" Siggan read with interest that all forms of manufacturing were up, electronics were big, and in general everything was booming.

And in some of the pictures, she saw people she knew, sprinkled among the strangers. At least, they *looked* like people she knew. But what would Caine be doing on a local soccer team? Why would Morgan be addressing Buchella's Chamber of Commerce?

Siggan and Storm each bought a haunch of lamb from a peddler. They ate, looking around. A 1929 Cadillac shouldered aside a horse-drawn gig.

A girl approached Stormbringer. "Hi!" she yelled. (Everyone yelled in Buchella; it was the only way to be heard.) "You look like you've got strong legs. C'mon to the dance marathon with me, and we'll win the prize!"

She was a sturdy, pretty girl, with a laughing face and flying hair. Storm liked her at once. But he tried to remind himself of responsibility, and sobriety, and Siggan.

"I really have to look for a place to stay," he told the girl.

"Oh, that's okay," she assured him. "My mom has plenty of room. C'mon!"

Storm couldn't resist. He waved to Siggan, letting himself be pulled away. "See you later, Sis!"

Ambivalent, Siggan watched her brother disappear in the swirling crowd. In a way, she was well rid of him. But she felt awfully alone.

She shrugged. She would do just fine. She'd escaped from Caine. She'd made it through the Land of the Dead. She refused to be put off by some people having a loud party.

She moved off down the street, alert and wary. She wasn't the only one armed. A few others had weapons, ranging from blades to

laser pistols, but there was no aura of hostility. Gradually, Siggan relaxed. No one had offered her the slightest harm, though the vendors seemed eager to offer her everything else.

She ignored the sellers of food, gewgaws, and fireworks. She found a newsstand, and tried to buy a map of Buchella.

The vendor seemed puzzled. "I don't have any. Why do you need a map? In Buchella, you can always find anything you need within a block or two."

"In that case, where is a nice quiet inn?" she asked pointedly. 'Anything' ought to include some peace and quiet. If ever there were a valuable commodity...

"Right down there," the vendor replied smugly, pointing. "Vincent's. It's not cheap, of course... but it *is* quiet."

Siggan thanked him. But inwardly, she was dubious.

On the way down the street, she noticed one particular paperboy, out of the throng of buyers and sellers. She noticed, because he was shouting, "Amber Chronicle! All the news from Amber!"

Siggan couldn't believe it. But there it was. She bought a paper, and the whole thing was about the doings of Amberites. All the news, this issue, seemed to be about the outlawing of Morgan, Carolan, and Harlan.

The headline proclaimed, "THE HUNT IS ON!" Caine glowered in lifelike color, over a caption that read, "Carolan is mine, wherever he may hide."

As she stared at the paper, aghast, something brushed Siggan's hip. Thinking of pickpockets, she whirled. But what she saw made her stop dead. No pun intended.

Uncle Siggan.

By reflex, confronted with a wolf, she tried for mental contact. 'Uncle, how...?'

She broke off, staggering backward. It was Uncle, all right. She'd know that blast of psychic pain anywhere.

But, experimenting cautiously, she found that the pain was *only* around Uncle. Somehow, he was a piece of the Land of the Dead, walking free in Buchella. Everyone else here was alive.

This place was even weirder than she'd thought.

"Do you want me to follow you?" she asked Uncle.

He shook his head, no. In fact, he showed every disposition to follow *her*.

Stunned, Siggan hurried down the street to Vincent's. Uncle followed her. She had to find a quiet place to think, and to read the Amber Chronicle.

And the vendor's boast was true: Vincent's was actually quiet. All noise was cut off—perhaps by magic—as Siggan passed the front gate. In a corner of the lobby, a trio played a complex, classical air.

That was the loudest sound in the whole place.

You really *could* buy anything, in Buchella. Even quiet.

Siggan rented a room for herself and Uncle. It wasn't cheap. But of course, she had only to concentrate, and she had plenty of the local money. One thing an Amberite never has to do, is travel second class.

In her room, Siggan read through the whole Amber Chronicle. The style was rather lurid, and she wondered how much truth there was in any of it.

There was an article about her and Storm. With pictures.

'Damn,' she thought, 'I'd better think about changing my appearance.' "Are Siggan and Stormbringer still with their villainous father, or have they defied him?" the writer wondered.

'I could tell him a thing or two,' Siggan reflected. 'But how did they find out about the split in the family?'

She also found a small article, on a back page. "Solem reputed to be holed up in Trump Fortress. Reliable source says Thufir and Morgunt reported still his prisoners."

She told herself that maybe it wasn't true. How reliable could such a sleazy paper be?

For now, Siggan had a phone she could use to call Room Service, a huge, oval tub, and an enormous, friendly bed. She ordered two meals, only to discover that Uncle didn't eat. It would take some getting used to, traveling with a dead person. How was it possible for him to be here?

Siggan decided to relax, bathe, and sleep. Whatever was going to happen, she'd deal with it better if she were full, clean, and rested. When night fell, hopefully the streets would be quieter, and she'd go out and explore Buchella.

Meanwhile, Storm and his pretty friend easily won the dance marathon. She was amazing, for a human. Lots of endurance. And, of course, Storm wasn't tired at all. They grinned for the camera, as they claimed their gilded-plastic trophy.

"Come on," the girl coaxed. "Let's go back to my place."

A fine idea. But, wild and free as he liked to be, Storm didn't really want to lose track of Siggan. There had to be *some* constancy to life.

"I have to call my sister," he told the girl firmly. "Only... oh, hell. I just realized, I don't know where she is."

"Oh, that's no problem," the girl answered airily. "What's her name?"

Stormbringer hesitated for just a moment. But, who in Buchella could ever have heard of Siggan?

"Her name's Siggan," he said.

"No problem," the girl assured him. She picked up a nearby phone, and said, "Get me Siggan. New in town. Brother named Stormbringer."

She handed Storm the phone. It was ringing. On the fourth ring, Siggan answered. "Hello?"

"Hi, Sis. It's me. We won the dance marathon."

"That's nice. I think you'd better come over. Uncle Siggan's here."

"???!"

"You heard me." Siggan's voice was firm, and a little grim.

"I'll be right over," Storm assured her.

Hanging up the phone, Siggan looked at the clock in her room. She'd been fast asleep, following a good dinner and a leisurely bath. It was the middle of the night. While she waited for Storm to show up, she might as well see whether Buchella was any quieter.

So she hit the street. But it wasn't quieter. If anything, it was worse: people were using all the fireworks they'd bought during the day.

She heard a familiar name in the press of noise: "...Degaz attacked by Solem! Read all about it in the Chaos News/Herald!"

Siggan hurried to buy a Chaos News/Herald. On the front page was a huge, lurid picture of Solem, holding a pistol to the forehead of a man who lay helpless, with blood all over his face. A large dog, with blood on its fangs, crouched nearby, baring its teeth at the fallen man.

Siggan scanned the article quickly. It didn't say where the attack had taken place, or what had happened to Degaz. Was he all right? Was he even alive?

Frantic with worry, Siggan wanted to dash off to his rescue. He was, after all, her patron deity. But she had no idea how to proceed. And, anyway, Degaz was a God: how could Solem possibly have threatened him?

She stood, with the edges of the paper crumpled in her clenched hands. How long till the next edition? And what could she possibly do for Degaz?

And then she heard another newsboy, shouting *her own* name.

"Siggan and Stormbringer visit Buchella! Get your Amber Chronicle!"

Siggan stood very still for a long moment. Then she looked. Yes. She and Storm were the headline of the Midnight Edition.

She bought a paper. She made it back to her room in Vincent's Inn. She sat down to read.

"Siggan and Stormbringer arrived today in Buchella, fresh from an epic trek across Shadow. Are they on a mission for their father? Are they searching for someone? Or is it merely that a romance is budding between Siggan and King Gerian?"

There was a picture of Storm, dancing with that girl. And a shot of Siggan herself, in the lobby of Vincent's. There was even a closeup of Uncle, captioned, "Uncle Siggan, direct from the Land of the Dead." The things this writer knew!

Siggan jumped up and began to pace, thinking furiously. Obviously, she had two choices. She could flee Buchella at once. Or she could remember that most assassins hated the glare of publicity.

Just then Stormbringer burst in, panting. "Sis, look! I bought this paper on the street, the Amber Chronicle, and it says --"

"I *know* what it says. I've got one, too. The question is, what do we do about it?"

As they began to talk it over, the phone rang. Gingerly, Siggan picked it up and said, "Hello?"

"Hello, Siggan?" a man's voice enthused into her ear. "Amber Chronicle here. I can make you and your brother a very lucrative offer for an exclusive interview. What do you say?"

'Ah,' Siggan thought. 'A chance to get my point of view on record. Why not?'

"Never mind the offer," she said crisply. "Ask your questions."

"Okay. Tell me in your own words: how does it feel to live in fear of your own father, and yet still love him?"

"*What*? You have the situation completely wrong."

"Oh? Then you would describe your feeling as more one of fear and hatred?"

"That's not what I mean, at all!" Siggan stopped, confused. Despite their parting, she loved her father as much as ever. But it seemed poor strategy to go on record with an impassioned defense.

The reporter didn't give her time to think. "Do you feel confident that residence in the City of Buchella can protect you from your father's reprisals?"

Here, Siggan felt herself to be on firmer ground. "I don't expect any reprisals. We simply agreed to part."

"In that case, we can expect you to leave in the near future, to meet him somewhere beyond the Gateway?" The reporter sounded excited. He shouted to someone at his end, "Stop the presses!"

"I have no plans to rejoin my father. *What* Gateway?"

"The Gateway Beyond The Universe, of course. Where your family went, after their narrow escape from Deirdre and Corwin. Listen, are wedding bells likely between you and the King, any time soon?"

"I haven't had the pleasure of meeting King Gerian. So I can say

positively there's no truth to any such rumors." Siggan's mouth fielded the question (luckily it was an easy one) while her mind spun crazily. 'Gateway? Deirdre and Corwin? Oh, Gods, what's going *on?*'

"Then you didn't come to Buchella for a secret rendezvous with His Majesty?" asked the reporter, sounding disappointed.

"No, I didn't. Listen. You're a reporter, you hear things. Do you know what happened to Degaz? Did Solem shoot him?"

"Oh, you read the Chaos News/Herald. No, Degaz got out of that mess. Now he's in another one. You will be meeting the King at the Royal Ball, won't you?"

As if she could worry about some stupid party. "I haven't been invited to the Royal Ball."

"Oh. How do you feel about being passed over for an invitation to the Royal Ball?"

Siggan's temper boiled over. "Will you please stop trying to foment trouble?" she snapped.

Storm had been listening, one ear cocked near the receiver. He snickered. "Give him a break, Sis. If he stops trying to foment trouble, he'll probably lose his job."

A slight pause was the extent of the reporter's response to Siggan's request. Then he plowed on. "Are you saying you'd *scorn* an invitation to the Royal Ball?"

"Certainly not," Siggan answered with dignity. "I would never be guilty of such rudeness."

She decided the interview had gone on long enough. "Stormbringer and I appreciate the hospitality of Buchella. You may tell your readers we are having a marvelous vacation, and expect to continue enjoying ourselves in your fair city."

She started to hang up. But the reporter said, "May I talk to Stormbringer, please?"

Siggan hesitated. Her faith in her brother's discretion was less than perfect. But Storm made a grab for the receiver, and she who hesitated, lost it.

'He's always been that way,' Siggan reflected. 'Nobody could ever invent a new game, however silly, that Storm didn't want to try.'

"Hello. This is Stormbringer."

"How does it feel to live in fear of your own father?"

"*What*? I don't live in fear of my father."

"Do the difficulties you've experienced getting along with your father have to do with your being the smallest and youngest in your family?"

"You mean, the runt," Storm translated wryly.

"Well, I wasn't going to put it *that* way, exactly," answered the reporter, a little taken aback.

"I don't have any real difficulty getting along with my father. We

just had to go our separate ways, that's all."

"You are saying you have a *cordial* relationship with your father?" asked the reporter, recovering quickly.

"That's right. Pretty much. I—"

"Then, did Morgan actually *send* you to Buchella, on a secret mission? Is it—-"

"*NO*!" Storm's best bellow actually stopped the reporter again. "There is *no* secret mission. My sister and I are in Buchella for a vacation, and that's *it*."

"Oh. Then perhaps you can comment on the status of your relationship with Deanna?"

"Deanna?"

"There's no use pretending you don't know her. The whole city's read about how you and she won the dance marathon."

"I wouldn't go so far as to say we have a relationship."

"Do you mean you've jilted her? I heard you made a lot of big promises, and then walked away."

"No, I didn't jilt her. I—"

"You *haven't* jilted her. Good for you. Is it true there's a love child in the offing?"

"We're just good friends," Storm insisted, slightly dizzy.

"I see. How do you feel about your sister's involvement with King Gerian?"

"My sister isn't involved with King Gerian."

"How will you feel, if your sister *becomes* involved with King Gerian?"

"I'd say what she does is her own business."

"Have you received an invitation to the Royal Ball?"

"No."

"How do you feel about not receiving an invitation?"

"No comment. Listen, I have to go now. Have a nice day."

Before the reporter could ask him anything else, Storm quickly hung up. He and Siggan looked at one another for a moment.

Taking optimism as his fallback position as usual, Storm finally ventured, "I guess we did okay."

Siggan nodded, relaxing a little. "Pretty well, I suppose."

"What now? Should we leave?" Storm asked.

"I hate to. This is such a good place to hear what's going on."

They kicked it around for awhile, and finally decided to stay at least till morning. Storm went to his own room for a good meal, and some sleep. Siggan passed the time reading and pacing, and finally she also dozed.

In the morning, Siggan woke thinking of the big oval tub. But she quickly noticed that a letter had been slipped under her door.

She read it. It was an engraved invitation to the Royal Ball. The paper was cream-colored and slightly, tastefully scented. It was signed by King Gerian, personally.

Siggan called Storm's room, to tell him of this latest development.

"Yeah, I got one too," he said. "Are we going?"

Siggan reflected that, after saying she would not scorn an invitation, she could hardly refuse to go, without publicly humiliating Gerian. And then it might become very difficult to stay in Buchella. Until she had a clear destination in mind, she wanted to stay where she could hear all the latest rumors. What better protection than the image of a harmless, heartless party girl?

"Certainly we're going," she told Storm firmly. "I wouldn't miss it."

"Okay, Sis. Want to come down to my room for breakfast?"

"Sure. Be there as soon as I've had a bath."

"A short bath, okay? I'm hungry."

"You're always hungry. A short bath."

A short bath it was. But she didn't make it to Storm's room. When she opened the door of her suite, people flooded in.

For a split second, Siggan thought she was under attack. She came very close to killing somebody. But there was no menace: it was merely a bevy of dress-makers, loaded down with the tools of their trade.

"Don't worry, the King is paying for everything," explained a brisk, grey-haired lady who seemed to be in charge. "We're here to attire you for the Royal Ball."

'You're a party girl,' Siggan reminded herself firmly. 'Smile.'

She managed, not only to smile, but to be charmed. Delighted. Amazed. Soon she was chattering away about dress designs. The dressmakers loved her.

"Excuse me," she said, before she could get totally enmeshed. She pushed her way to the phone, past a young man wheeling a rack of shoes. She called Storm.

Quickly, she explained what was happening. "So I can't come to breakfast," she said. "In fact, if you don't mind, why don't you bring some breakfast down *here*? Unless you've got a platoon of tailors outside your door?"

"I'll check." There was a brief pause. "No. There was only a guy with a tuxedo on a rack. I tipped him, and he left. I guess you're the star: after all, you're the one who'll be dancing with the King."

"I guess I will. Are you coming down with the food?"

"Sure, no problem."

"Thanks. And, Storm?"
"Yeah, Sis?"
"Smile for the nice folks."

Storm brought some breakfast to Siggan's suite. But, having finished his meal, he quickly grew bored with the endless consultations over fabric, cut, and accessories. He left, and returned to his own suite, down the hall.

He spent some time pondering his ability to change his own shape. He considered trying again to master the demon-form he had assumed involuntarily in the Land of the Dead. But in the end, he decided against it. The feeling of losing himself...the inability to remember his own actions...the terrible things people had told him he'd done... No. Not a good idea.

He decided to practice more ordinary shape-shifting, instead. First, he decided to become another person... his own father, Morgan.

Storm willed himself *not* to be Storm. Carefully, he molded his body, and even the surface of his mind, into an exact copy of Morgan. When he was finished, he scanned the result, and found it good. He had achieved an almost perfect "Morgan-ness".

Abruptly, he found himself receiving a Trump call.

He tried to copy something he'd seen his sister Morwena do: he brought the Pattern to his mind, seeking to make it actual and powerful before him.

But, before he could do it, or even be sure he *could* do it, the room changed about him. Startled, he lost his nascent grip on the Pattern.

A woman stood before him: very tall and blond, very beautiful. Behind her, Storm could see the walls, suddenly hung with long, thin banners, in strips of gold, silver, and metallic blue. The banners made a perfect background for the lady as she stood, erect and lovely, in robes of the same shades.

Storm stared into her dark-blue eyes, and was awed. Hers was the most powerful psyche he'd ever encountered.

She smiled at him, her lips moving as if to speak. Then she checked, startled. She looked at him closely. He had the feeling she saw far more than his outer form.

She chuckled, a low sound of music in the banner-hung room.

"Congratulations," she said. "You fooled me."

"Oh, you thought I was Morgan," Storm answered. He shifted quickly into his own form, to introduce himself. "I'm his son, Stormbringer. Who are you?"

"Cistel."

"I never heard of you."

"My brothers and sisters tend not to speak of me."

"And who are they?"

"Oh, Benedict and the whole oafish lot. I've had trouble contacting Morgan. May I speak with you?"

"Sure."

Cistel moved her hands, and conjured up a table with two chairs. It held an interesting assortment of dishes, some steaming, some beaded with moisture. The room was suddenly full of delicious odors.

"How did you do that?" Stormbringer asked her.

"It's easy," she explained. "The Shadows in this area have certain useful properties. Let's have lunch."

Cistel moved to the table. Storm joined her, astonished. Here (if she spoke the truth) was a daughter of Oberon, whom Storm had never met or heard of. A lady of enormous power and presence: an ally?

She poured champagne for them both. Storm noted the slim, graceful strength of her white hands. Lifting her glass, she toasted, "To Morgan."

"To Morgan," Storm affirmed. They drank.

Cistel regarded some private distance, over the rim of her glass. "Morgan, wherever you are, may you keep them running a long time."

Her gaze snapped back to the present, and settled on Storm's face. "Now, are you planning to follow him?"

Storm shook his head. "Probably not. Depending on what Siggan wants. I'd like to know my status with Amber."

Cistel considered for a moment. "Most of those hunting your father have already passed this point."

"What did you want with Morgan?"

"I was going to offer him some assistance. Perhaps I should offer it to you."

From within her robes, she drew a few playing cards, and handed them to Storm. "Try them from time to time," she offered. "I think you'll find them useful."

He examined the cards. They were colder than normal Trumps, with a glassy sheen. From the moment he touched them, Storm felt uneasy.

Deirdre. Corwin. Caine. Julian. Derek. Solem. Jaeger. The treatment of each subject was stark, simplistic. The back of each card showed a long, thin banner of silver, gold, and metallic blue, twisting about a pole.

The strange Trumps were cold and spidery. It came to Storm that, in some fashion he did not understand, the cards were deadly traps.

He handed the cards back to Cistel. As they left his hands, he felt a great relief.

"These are really my father's enemies," he said. "Perhaps you should give them to him. I don't want to make any enemies I don't have to. Dad is more than capable on his own."

Cistel rose from her chair. Storm got to his feet as well. Was she angry?

But she smiled. She moved forward, with the quick, quiet ease of a wave on a calm day. She said nothing, but kissed Storm on the cheek.

And in the moment of the kiss, she and her table and her banners were gone from the room.

Storm stood for a moment, thinking furiously. He was interrupted by the ringing of the telephone.

He picked up the receiver. "Stormbringer here."

"This is the Amber Chronicle," said the man at the other end. "I understand you've just had a visit from the mysterious Sister Cistel."

Storm looked quickly around his room. He could see no devices for discreet observation.

"No comment," he told the reporter.

"Is it really true that you have no interest in tracking down Morgan?"

"Not really. Morgan has a death complex."

"Can you describe this death complex for our readers?"

"I'm not a psychiatrist."

"Why did Cistel only appear to you when you were disguised as Morgan?"

"I don't know. I was just practicing my shape-shifting. That's something we Amberites do, you know."

"All Amberites have this power?"

"Yes. Some more than others."

"And you have no idea why Cistel appeared, just as you were practicing your father's form?"

"No. I don't know very much about her... not even who her full brothers and sisters are."

"She doesn't have any."

"Sad. It's good to have full brothers and sisters."

"Oh. Then you think the presence of so many half-brothers and half-sisters is responsible for much of the dissension and destruction in Amber? How about some details?"

"I don't know any. Look, I have to go."

"No, wait, I have more questions."

"Well, I'm sure we'll talk again. You must have more interesting things to write about."

With that, Storm hung up. Looking about the room more carefully, he still could not find any listening devices.

The telephone rang again.

"This is the Buchella Gazette. I understand you've given an exclusive interview to our competitor, the Amber Chronicle. May I ask you a few questions?"

"In a word, no," said Storm, and hung up.

Considering for a moment, he next made psychic contact with Siggan. He found his sister standing on some kind of block, being draped with lengths of gorgeous fabric. She was chattering away a mile a minute with the dress- makers. She continued to converse with them, giving them the surface of her attention, even as most of her mind shifted toward Stormbringer.

'Sis,' he projected, 'something's happened.'

'Tell me,' Siggan demanded.

'I've just had a visit from a beautiful blond lady.' Mentally, he transmitted Cistel's picture. 'She says her name's Cistel, and that Benedict and the rest of our great-aunts and -uncles are her brothers and sisters. She offered me some strange Trumps, of Deirdre, Corwin, Caine, Julian, Derek, Solem, and Jaeger. But I didn't like the feeling of those Trumps. They were weapons, traps. I gave them back to her.'

'*Damn*! You didn't *take* them?'

'They were dangerous. They could've boomeranged on *me*.'

'But you could've given them to *me*.'

'I doubly wouldn't give them to *you*.'

'Thank you *so* much, dear brother.' Siggan's mouth smiled sweetly at one of the dressmakers. But her mind was seething with frustration and fury. 'Did anything else happen?'

'Just some reporters, calling to bother me. They already knew about Cistel. I'm sure these rooms are bugged.'

'I'll keep it in mind.'

'Okay, guess I'll leave you to your fitting.'

Storm remained in his room for a while, pondering his encounter with Cistel.

Siggan continued to smile sweetly, and to chatter, while inwardly seething. She knew she was probably being watched. She was determined to appear as a pretty, frivolous young thing, not at all dangerous.

But her thoughts were far from sweet. She and Stormbringer were in such a precarious position. How could he have passed up the chance to acquire such powerful weapons? She'd seen Storm routinely take tremendous risks, casually, for nothing. And then,

when a little risk might have done them some good, he'd gotten cold feet. How *could* he?

By 2:00 p.m., the dressmakers had finished their measurements and preliminary fittings.

"We'll leave you now," the lady who commanded the adornment brigade told Siggan. "The rest of our work will be better done in the shop. We'll come back at 4:00 o'clock, to prepare you for the Ball."

Siggan thanked her, and smiled charmingly at the whole crew. They left. Immediately, Siggan makes a psychic call to her brother.

'Come down here, please,' she asked him.

'All right,' he answered. 'What's the dress like?'

She sent him a picture of herself, in a low-cut ball gown of royal blue velvet. The neckline was scalloped, and the midriff boned, pushing her breasts up invitingly. The skirt was widely flared. There was a little matching purse, and a satin scarf.

'I'm going to look absolutely gorgeous.'

Storm agreed, with a mental chuckle. 'You'll be married before I know it.'

'Don't jump to conclusions,' she answered playfully. 'Maintain adequate respect.'

In her mind, there occurred a picture of Stormbringer, bowing deeply, but still grinning.

'I'll be right over,' he told her.

'Good. We have until 4:00 o'clock. There are some things I want to try.'

She cut the contact, and began to pace, thinking furiously. But she'd only crossed the room once, when the telephone rang.

She picked up the receiver. "Hello?"

"Front desk," said a man's voice. "There are some reporters down here. They ask whether you'll grant them an interview."

She had no time for that, at the moment. "No," she answered. "I'll be going to the Ball in a few hours. Please ask them to wait until then."

"Yes, ma'am," answered the desk clerk respectfully.

Siggan hung up the phone, thinking hard. How should she...

There was a knock at her door. It was Storm. She let him in, and they sat down.

'I believe I'll try shape-shifting into our father,' she told him, keeping the conversation on a mental level, to reduce the chance of being overheard.

'Why not just call her? She's a strong psi.'

Siggan nodded. 'All right.' She prepared to try it.

Storm lifted one hand in a beseeching gesture. 'Wait. Why are you doing this?'

'I want to know about those Trumps.'

'They're bad news. Don't do it.'

But he couldn't dissuade her.

'At least,' he said finally, 'before you get your mind blown away, tell me about when I was a demon.'

Siggan pictured for him mentally, in detail, what had occurred when Storm had changed to demon form. The two of them had stopped at an inn, on their way through Shadow. Having left the Land of the Dead, Storm had hoped for control of the demon shape he'd involuntarily assumed there.

But he'd had no control. He'd killed a man, and wounded Siggan. He'd nearly gotten away, after which, who knew what might've happened to him?

But Siggan had followed him through his Trump, which had still worked despite the radical change in his appearance and personality. She had managed to subdue him mentally, and force him to change to human form. He had been unable to remember anything he'd done as a demon.

When Siggan had finished explaining, Storm shuddered. 'What I did then was dangerous,' he admitted. 'But what you're about to do is even more dangerous.'

But Siggan wouldn't listen.

Storm nearly went back to his own room, to leave Siggan to her fate. But he couldn't bring himself to do it. He stayed, summoning up the Pattern in front of himself as a protection.

Siggan tried hard to call Cistel with her mind, using an image of Cistel from Storm's mind. But she failed.

Storm's relief was short-lived, however. Siggan then changed herself into a perfect physical replica of Morgan, and tried again. That didn't work, either.

Finally, as Storm had done earlier, she made the surface of her psyche as much like Morgan's mind as possible. She reached out for Cistel with all the strength of her being. She did not move, nor cease concentration, for ten minutes.

'She's probably not going to answer,' Storm finally projected.

'Why not? How do you know?' Siggan answered crossly.

'She's probably gone beyond the Gate, the one we read about in the Amber Chronicle, to give the Trumps to Morgan.'

Dejected, Siggan stopped her sending. Storm breathed a sigh of relief.

"All right," she said aloud. "I guess there's nothing for us to do here. Let's go out and explore Buchella."

"Fine with me."

Siggan put on some leather slacks and a shirt. She concealed her knife and her Colt .45 about her person. Storm was already wearing casual pants and a shirt, and a dagger in his boot. He decided this

was sufficient in Buchella, where almost everyone seemed to go unarmed.

As they left Siggan's suite, Uncle Siggan rose from where he had been lying in a corner, and followed. The three of them strolled down the hall to the elevator, which lowered them smoothly to the lobby. They proceeded across the lobby, and out the front door.

Outside, the normal hubbub of the Buchellan streets was augmented by a small mob of reporters. A wave of flashbulbs dazzled the two Amberites. Someone shouted, "A question, Mistress Siggan?"

"I asked you to wait for the Ball," Siggan reminded the reporters, annoyed.

"Oh, sorry," answered the questioner, a tall, thin man with a mustache. He, and all the other reporters, turned to look hopefully at Storm.

Storm had to laugh. They looked so much like puppies around a dinner table. "Okay," he said. "What's the question?"

The tall reporter brightened. "How do you feel about Eric, the former King of Amber, coming to look for Siggan?" he asked eagerly.

"*What*? Why would he do that?" Storm demanded, shocked.

"Oh, you're mystified?" said the reporter.

"*Yeah*."

Looking worried, Storm quickly changed himself into a hawk, sprang up into the air, and flew away, leaving his clothes on the sidewalk. This caused Siggan to be nearly blinded by flashbulbs. But Siggan was too worried to care.

She turned to the tall reporter. "Eric is coming *here*?" she asked.

"That's right."

"But *why*?"

"I don't know. Say, if you want to ask me questions, can I ask you some? Question for question?"

"All right," Siggan agreed.

"Are we about to see open warfare here?"

"I hope not. I'd like to avoid soiling your fair city with bloodshed."

"Sounds good to me," the reporter agreed fervently.

"My question now," said Siggan. "When did Eric enter Buchella?"

The reporter looked at his watch. "Twenty-three minutes ago."

Siggan's heart sank: that coincided with her attempt to contact Cistel.

"My turn," said the reporter. "Do you plan to appeal to the City of Buchella for protection?"

"I hope that won't be necessary. I don't yet know Eric's intentions. Where is Eric now?"

The reporter pointed down the street. "That way, about ten blocks, and closing fast. Do you think this incident will affect the

plans for your nuptials with King Gerian?"

"As I keep telling the press, all rumors of any nuptials are premature, since I haven't yet met King Gerian." Making this standard reply, Siggan had attention left over to reach for her brother with her mind. She found him easily, and he gave her a diamond-clear view of Buchella through a hawk's eyes.

Sure enough, down the street about eight blocks away, Storm could see Eric, once of Amber, cutting quickly through the Buchellan traffic on a large black horse. The horse was quite clearly dead, but still moving rapidly.

Behind Eric, a flying wedge of dead troopers on dead horses pushed through the crowds of Buchellans.

This picture so horrified Siggan that she froze, staring. What could she do?

"Mistress Siggan! Mistress Siggan!"

She looked up. It was the reporter. "You still owe me a question!" he reminded her.

She nodded mechanically. "Ask."

"Are you the reason for Uhlmethan, a Lord of Chaos, accepting an invitation to tonight's Royal Ball? And what about the appearance of Dworkin's Trump Shop?"

Siggan blinked. The reporter had sneaked in an extra question, but she couldn't have cared less.

"I don't know, to both. It would be rank arrogance for me to believe *all* these people are coming merely to pursue me," she said. Meanwhile, she thought frantically to Storm, 'If you go to Dworkin's Trump Shop, you may be able to get some help.'

'You'd better get out of there, Sis,' Storm answered. 'Look at those dead guys move! Even the Buchellans are getting out of their way. They'll be in front of Vincent's in about sixty seconds. And what can we do to Eric? He's dead, so we can't hurt him physically. And dead people are immune to psi.'

He streaked back down out of the sky and landed next to Siggan, becoming human at the point of landing. Of course, he was naked. At once, he was lit from all sides by another round of flashbulbs. He struggled into his clothes, commenting audibly on the lawsuits he would launch should any of those pictures be published.

Siggan turned and hurried back into the hotel lobby, while Storm was still pulling on his pants. No one followed her, not even Uncle Siggan. She was glad: Eric was looking for her, after all, not them.

She hurried to the elevator, and made it upstairs with no signs of pursuit. Quickly, she let herself into her suite.

In the street below, Storm hurriedly finished dressing, just as Eric on his dead charger came pounding to a stop right in front of him. The ex-King of Amber leaped from his mount to confront Storm.

"A word with you," said Eric.

"Hi," Storm answered, his usual nonchalance sounding just a bit strained. "Long time no see."

In fact, it hadn't been that long since Storm's last (and only) sight of Eric. On that occasion, in the throne room of a replica of Amber Castle in the Land of the Dead, Storm had watched through a spyhole as Jaeger had burned out Eric's eyes with a hot poker. Eric had been dragged away in the direction of the dungeons, screaming. Yet here he was, in full possession of his eyesight, followed by about thirty dead soldiers.

"Wait here," Eric ordered his men. He shook Storm's hand, retained his grip when Storm tried to let go, and shepherded Storm into the lobby.

"What can I do for you?" Storm asked.

"For starters, take me to your sister."

In fact, Eric was doing the steering. He maneuvered the younger man across the lobby and into the elevator. Without asking, the dead king stabbed the button for the second floor.

Storm noted that Eric seemed quite healthy... for a man who did not breathe unless he wanted to speak. And they were no longer in the Land of the Dead. So Storm tried for a bit of psychic contact. Very shallow: yet the blast of psychic pain was overwhelming. Storm sank to the floor, unconscious.

In her room, Siggan paced, thinking furiously.

She strode to the window, drew the drapes, and looked out. She could change into a bird, and fly away...

Siggan stopped, staring. She had never looked out the windows of this suite. Why look at the crowded streets of Buchella? That wasn't what she saw, though.

Outside, there was a quiet, tree-lined avenue, with a few well-dressed people strolling. Beyond the avenue, occasional towers graced a park-like landscape. It was clean, quiet, and beautiful: it was *nothing* like the streets of Buchella.

And, Siggan seemed to be looking out from one of the towers. She estimated she was on about the eighth floor.

But, her room at Vincent's was on the *second* floor.

Siggan considered diving out the window in bird-form, anyhow. But, the last time she'd dived into an unknown landscape, she'd wound up in the Land of the Dead.

She decided to stay and meet Eric. She wasn't *his* enemy: he'd died before she was born. She'd never attempted to obtain a trap-Trump of *him*.

She closed the drapes. Composing herself, she quickly found her sword and put it on. Then she sat at the desk in the suite's living room, to wait.

After only a few seconds, the suite's front door was kicked open with a crash. Stormbringer was thrown into the room: he landed, sprawled on the carpet, and did not move. But Siggan had a moment to observe that he was breathing.

Then Eric strode into the room. Siggan had seen his image in Morgan's mind: a big, black-bearded man, who moved like a tiger. If anything, he was more impressive in person. It was an effort for her to remain calm.

Eric stepped carelessly over Storm's body. "I believe you were looking for someone," he said coldly to Siggan.

She stared back at him, her gaze cool and level. "I was indeed, My Lord. But it wasn't you."

Eric's lip curled, as if to say he knew very well who she wanted, and why. He strode directly toward Siggan, and she almost drew her sword. Yet, somehow she sensed that it wasn't an attack. Eric was focused, not on Siggan, but on the desk where she sat.

Puzzled, she stood and stepped aside. She could see no harm in allowing Eric to use the desk. She herself had not used it at all, during her stay in the suite.

Eric yanked open the desk's top drawer, and pulled out a few playing cards. He fanned the cards in front of Siggan's face: Deirdre; Corwin; Caine; Julian; Derek; Solem; Jaeger. Eric flipped the cards and showed Siggan the backs of the cards: each showed a long, slim banner of silver, gold, and metallic blue, twining about a pole.

These were the Trumps Siggan had wanted from Cistel.

"How did *those* get there?" Siggan asked, not needing to feign astonishment.

"You asked for them," Eric growled, waving the trap-Trumps under her nose. "You've been plotting with Cistel. This proves it."

Wide-eyed with dismay, Siggan shook her head. "No. I just wanted to *know* about these cards."

"This is a Trump of Jaeger," Eric continued inexorably, dealing out one of the cards. "This proves you're plotting against him."

"*No*," Siggan insisted.

"I'm sorry. It does. This is a deadly trap. To possess this Trump is to make serious preparations to destroy Jaeger."

Siggan continued to deny the charge. She kept trying to explain. But Eric was no longer listening. He turned and paced to the limp

figure of Storm, and kicked him.

After a few kicks, Storm moaned and sat up.

Storm's dismay was apparent at the sight of Cistel's Trumps.

"You've seen these before," Eric accused him. "Cistel gave them to you, didn't she?"

"She *tried* to give them to me, but I wouldn't take them," Storm answered. "Those aren't *my* enemies."

Eric turned on Siggan. "So *you* took them, instead."

"She didn't know what she was doing," Storm protested. "Siggan is naive, and curious. She doesn't know when to leave well enough alone."

Siggan appeared abashed by this portrayal. "I... I'm sorry," she faltered. "I guess I just didn't think."

Eric stared at her, still suspicious, tucking away the Trumps in his doublet. "If you're not plotting, would you assist me with a small problem that *I* have?" he asked.

"I have no real enemies in Amber," Siggan told him. "Despite what you're thinking, I want to keep it that way. You have the Trumps now, so there's no way I can use them to hurt Jaeger, even if I wanted to, which I don't. Why don't we just go our separate ways?"

Eric shook his head, with a grim smile. "Not so fast. There are things I want to accomplish, and I can see where you might be of service. I think you might make good bait."

"Bait for who?" asked Storm.

"For your father, of course."

"But, he doesn't even know where we are," Storm protested.

"That can be remedied," Eric answered softly, his eyes narrowing in thought.

"You've got it all wrong," Storm told him. "Dad doesn't care that much what happens to us."

"Maybe," said Eric, still in that soft, considering voice. "We'll see."

"You don't understand," Storm insisted. "We have nothing to do with Dad anymore. All I really want is to go back to Amber."

Eric threw back his handsome head and laughed. "It would be amusing if you tried to return," he said. "There are forces arrayed against you that would destroy you, so easily..."

"But, why?" Storm asked blankly.

Eric smiled nastily. "Because you are the blood of Morgan," he answered mockingly. "The grandchildren of Brand, and the son and daughter of Morgan. Your blood is tainted. You can never remove that taint."

He waited a moment, allowing his words to sink in. Then he stalked away to the door. A pace short of the entrance, he turned to

regard them.

"Fortunately for you, I do not serve those of Amber, or I would now do them a small favor," he informed them softly. "But hear me. I will wait for you outside the gates of this city. When you leave here, be prepared to serve me as I wish. Otherwise, I will destroy you."

He stalked out of the room.

After a few seconds, Siggan and Storm heard the elevator door open, and then close again. Storm went to the door, and looked out.

"He's gone," Storm announced with open relief. "What do we do now?"

"We have time to consider that," Siggan said. "First, I have something to show you."

She led him to the window, and showed him the view.

"That's not Buchella," Storm said, taking in the clean sky and uncrowded lawns.

"It doesn't look like it," Siggan agreed. "But, what *is* it?"

Storm shrugged. "Only one way to find out," he said, reaching for the latch of the window.

Siggan nodded soberly. Her mind reached to link with Storm's, so that if necessary, she could try to pull him back. He accepted the link, working meanwhile with the window.

In a moment, the window swung wide. Changing to hawk form, Storm perched on the windowsill for a moment, then took flight.

It was beautiful countryside, carefully tended. The towers stood near enough to one another to provide the inmates with pleasant walks, but not near enough to seem crowded.

Next to one of the towers, Storm spotted an outdoor cafe. A few trees cast pleasant islands of shade over some of the tables. A few well-dressed, happy people sat drinking and talking.

Storm changed back into his human form. This time he was careful to change into himself, clothed. He walked up to the outdoor cafe, and was met by a smiling waiter.

"Good afternoon, sir," said the waiter. "Sun or shade?"

"Shade," Storm answered. He followed the waiter to a pleasant table, and sat down.

"Excuse me," Storm said to the waiter. "But, could you tell me where I am? I seem to have gotten turned around."

"Of course, sir." The waiter pointed up at the tower next to the cafe. "This is the Amber Arms Hotel."

"Am I still in Buchella?"

"Of course, sir. This is the part of Buchella which is outside the windows of the better hotels."

"But, why is it so different from the street view?"

"Why, because our guests find it so much more pleasant. I trust it meets with your approval?"

"Yes."

The waiter bowed. "Would you care for some refreshment?"

"I believe I would like some wine, and also some cheese and crackers."

"White wine, or red?"

"Red, please."

"I have just the thing. A nice little red, our house wine. Will that be satisfactory, sir?"

"I'm sure it will."

And indeed, it was delicious. So were the crackers and the cheese.

'Well, sis,' Storm thought to Siggan, over the psychic link, 'I think I'll just sit here for a few minutes. I should be all right.'

'I guess you will,' she answered. 'I'll meet you back at our rooms at 4:00 o'clock. All right?'

'Fine.'

She broke the contact. Storm sat for a while, pleasing his senses with the fine wine and the soft breeze.

After a while, Deanna, with whom Storm had won the dance marathon, came strolling along the walk. She asked whether she might join him; he was delighted. They sat, talking and laughing, until it was time for Storm to go.

Siggan sat alone in the living room of her suite, thinking, for several minutes.

Shortly, some workmen came to the open door.

"Would you mind if we repaired the door?" one asked, pointing to the lock Eric had kicked out

"Not at all," Siggan answered. "I believe I'll go out."

She prowled the hotel corridors, until she found a maid's closet. No windows. She needed a room with a window: unlike Stormbringer, she hated changing her shape in public.

Finally, on the ground floor, she located a small room that held several trash cans. There was a hatch, which presumably allowed the trash to be passed outside to the garbagemen. The room didn't smell very good, but that didn't matter. Siggan wouldn't be there long.

She propped open the hatch, and ducked back out of sight. In a moment, she had changed into a large hawk... Siggan-sized, in fact. She hopped to the sill of the hatch, and flew away.

She soared above the crowded, noisy Buchellan streets. The squares and avenues had no particular pattern, but they showed a basic likeness in that all of them were crowded.

Siggan swooped down into a square, looking carefully at the

signs of the shops.

A man in an improbably red sweater pointed up at her. "Look!" he cried. "It's Siggan in hawk form!" Other Buchellans stopped, to stare where he was pointing, and a little glob of crowd congealed on the pavement.

Siggan hovered on an air current above the square, and projected a thought into the man's mind. 'How do you know that?'

Smiling, the man pulled a copy of the Amber Chronicle from under his arm. He unfolded a sixteen-page living-color insert and showed it to her, page by page. It was mostly pictures of herself, flying. The headline read, "Siggan Seeks Dworkin's Shop".

Now, how could they have known *that*? And, to have printed and distributed the insert so quickly...

'You already know what I'm looking for,' Siggan thought to the man. 'Do you know where it is?'

"Sure. Just take that street. Go three blocks, then bear left around the next square. Can't miss it."

'Thank you.'

Siggan followed the directions. Sure enough, she found a shop whose sign was a white unicorn, rampant on a green field. Beneath the unicorn's hooves was printed, "DWORKIN'S TRUMP SHOP."

Siggan landed in the square a little way off, and resumed her human shape, being careful to include her clothing. Then she stood and watched the shop for a few minutes, creating a small eddy in the inevitable Buchellan crowd.

No one entered or left the Trump Shop, while she watched it.

At last she decided to explore the alley, next to the shop. Casually, she mingled with the throng until she reached the mouth of the alley. Then she turned, and walks between the Trump Shop and its left-hand neighbor.

It was quieter in the alley. But it didn't smell very good. A few bums sat on the dirty pavement, along with the trash. Wash hung damply from clotheslines. A woman opened a door for a moment, to throw a bucket of swill into the alley.

Siggan paid no heed to the local color. She was looking for a back door to the Trump Shop.

Ahead of her, a manhole cover suddenly flew upward. A huge green, scaly hand reached up from below, grasping the pavement. Red lava oozed from the hole.

A huge, demonic shape was tearing its way out of the sewer.

Siggan turned and ran back to the square. The demon did not follow. But, it appeared that one was not encouraged to come to the back door.

Fine, then. She would go to the front.

Siggan walked into Dworkin's Trump Shop. Unlike the usual

Buchellan shop, there were no gaudy wares laid out for sale: the shop was a small, bare room. As Siggan entered, a bell rang, and Dworkin shambled out of the back room.

His hunched shape was not impressive. But Siggan knew that Dworkin was the founder of her family on the Amberite side, and very powerful.

"Hello, sir," she greeted him respectfully.

"Hello," he answered kindly. "You're one of Morgan's children, yes?"

"Yes, sir. I'm Siggan."

"Good. I've been waiting for one of you to show up. I want to talk. Come back into my study, and have something to eat."

Siggan followed him through a curtained doorway. The study was walled with stone. There were bookshelves, and a fireplace, and a desk. The place was incredibly cluttered, and also dusty.

Dworkin invited Siggan to sit in an easy chair, and pulled up another for himself. He poured each of them a glass of what seemed to be blue vodka. Siggan took a sip, and it made her cough. Dworkin downed his casually, in one gulp, and poured himself another.

"That's better," he sighed. "Pardon me if I intruded on your plans in Buchella."

"How could you intrude?"

"I mean, by making my presence known."

"Oh, no, I'm glad."

"Good. I don't play family games. But I'd like you to do me a favor."

"Yes?"

Dworkin wore a robe, with pockets. From one pocket, he pulled a sealed envelope and held it out to Siggan.

"Please give this to Harlan," he said.

"What is it?" Siggan asked.

"A letter, and a pair of Trumps."

"Of whom?"

"I'd rather not say."

"They're not... dangerous, are they?"

"Oh, no. Not to you, and not to Harlan."

"Then I'll be happy to take them."

"Thank you." He handed her the envelope. "Fill me in. I don't get out much. What's been happening to you lately?"

Dworkin seemed so kind. And Siggan had always heard just what he claimed, that he didn't get involved in family politics. So, wishing for someone to confide in, she told him of her recent encounter with Eric.

"So now I feel lost," she finished. "I'm like a child among giants. With my own family, it was no different. I was a child among giants

there, too."

"You could rejoice in your childhood, for as long as you can," Dworkin suggested softly.

"But I'm so frightened. And nothing I want seems to work out. I want Amber. But if what Eric said is true, I'm an outlaw."

"You are, yes. But you chose."

"It's not fair. I followed my father for such a short time."

"But that was the time that was important. It committed you."

"I have to learn to survive. Will you teach me to live among these people?"

"Among the family, to live the way they do?" Dworkin shook his head. "No. Those games are pointless."

"Some win."

"No. Some go mad."

"Those who rule in Amber, win."

"No, they are the losers. The dead have won."

"What? How?"

"Ask Eric. Eric will teach you much. What precisely do you wish to learn?"

"I — everything. To fight... to practice magic... to work with the Pattern... I can't decide. What do you think?"

Dworkin laughed at her, but so gently that she couldn't take offense. "I think you are a child in a toyshop."

Abruptly he lifted his head, and stared out the portal opposite the entrance he and Siggan had used. "You'd better go," he announced, with sudden sharpness. "Someone is looking for you."

Siggan jumped up. "Who? The demon?"

"Uhlmethan? No."

"*Uhlmethan*?" That horrible shape, clawing its way out the of the sewer... Uhlmethan? One of Siggan's Gods?

Dworkin nodded. "The Demon Lord. Weren't you looking for him?"

Siggan remembered that, yes, Uhlmethan was called 'The Demon Lord'. "I didn't recognize him," she said rather blankly.

Dworkin was looking more and more agitated. "You have to go," he insisted roughly. "Hurry. It... it's happening..."

Siggan had heard about Dworkin's spells of madness. It was said that, when mad, he was very dangerous. She backed quickly toward the door by which she had entered.

"Thank you for the drink, and the talk," she said.

She hurried out of the room, and did not pause until she was out in the square, in Buchella.

She wandered, stricken by what she had heard, for a little while. Finally, she got a Trump call.

"Yes?"

He bowed to her. "My Lady, I am King Gerian," he said in a deep, quiet voice. "May I have the honor of this dance?"

Struck by him, Siggan curtsied in return. "You certainly may," she answered, smiling.

"It's me, Stormbringer. I'm back in your suite. Nothing much happened, but it's quarter to four. Shall I bring you through?"

"Yes, please." Siggan held out her hand, and grasped that of her brother. Storm pulled her through into her own living room. Absently, she noted that the door had been fixed.

"What's wrong, Sis? You look sad."

"I... I am sad. I've met Dworkin, and it's official. We're outlawed."

Even Storm's face fell a little at those words. "He can't help us, then?"

"No, not really. He just wanted to talk."

"Well then, I guess we're on our own."

"Yes. Well, I'm going to take a shower. Those fitters should be here any minute."

The fitters were on schedule. The next hour and a half were packed with preparations. Siggan had lived most of her life as a wolf, in the wilderness. Never before had she taken such meticulous care with every aspect of her appearance. The hairdresser, the manicurist, the facial expert and makeup artist, and of course the dressmakers, all spent incredible effort, just to make sure Siggan looked beautiful.

At least, when it was all done, Siggan could look in the mirror and feel their efforts had not been wasted. She *did* look beautiful. The blue velvet contours of the gown brought out the best in her figure, and her eyes looked very bright. Storm looked remarkably handsome too, in his simple, classical black tuxedo.

At 5:30, a limousine pulled up at the door to Vincent's. Flashbulbs lit Storm and Siggan to the waiting car. They were whisked to the ball, escorted by a motorcade of motorcycles.

The palace was in the middle of the city, lit by colored spotlights. More flashbulbs greeted the Amberites, as they were shown from the limousine to the grand palace entrance. Inside, a band was giving an excellent rendition of a rock tune, that made Siggan's feet itch to dance.

But when Siggan and Storm came to the ballroom entrance, there was a hush. A stately palace functionary called out their names and lineage. One man walked forward to greet them, while the throng of dancers made way for him and stood watching.

He was tall, with broad shoulders, and dark brown skin. He wore a simple black tuxedo, like Storm's. If he had worn rags, he would still have made people stare. The power in his walk was beautiful. Siggan knew who this must be.

He bowed to her. "My Lady, I am King Gerian," he said in a deep, quiet voice. "May I have the honor of this dance?"

Struck by him, Siggan curtsied in return. "You certainly may,"

she answered, smiling.

The King smiled too, and gestured, and the music began again. She found him a wonderful dancer: graceful, powerful, and exquisitely attuned to his partner.

They danced together for several numbers. During a slow dance, with his arm warm around her waist, Siggan asked the King about the view from her hotel.

"Why?" he asked, smiling. "Don't you like it?"

"I like it very much. I merely wonder how it's done."

"Oh... real estate manipulation. Buy on margin, and combine one's holdings to best advantage. There's a trick to it, as with most things."

Siggan found King Gerian remarkably easy to talk to. His presence excited and pleased her.

Meanwhile, Stormbringer found that several lovely ladies were eager to dance with him. He chose one, and discovered that she danced as well as she looked. He enjoyed himself hugely. The ladies all but fought over him.

But presently, Storm noticed the King leading Siggan to a table at the ballroom's edge. Storm found himself curious to meet the King... so it was a pity, in a way, that Deanna chose that moment to walk up and say hi.

"Excuse me," Storm told her. "I'd like to dance with you, but I have to go talk to the King."

Deanna smiled, not offended at all. "Catch you later."

Storm arrived at the King's table, to hear Gerian presenting to Siggan a tall man in a green-black tuxedo. "Lady Siggan, may I present Lord Uhlmethan, of the Courts of Chaos?"

"Charmed," said Siggan, as Uhlmethan kissed her hand.

Uhlmethan smiled lazily. "It might have been a little earlier," he said. "But the pleasure could hardly have been greater."

Gerian also presented Uhlmethan to Stormbringer. The four of them sat down and ordered drinks.

"I'm glad you called on me," said Uhlmethan to Siggan. "I was deeply disappointed in your father. But I'm glad to see that you and Stormbringer remember the old ways."

"Thank you for coming," Siggan replied.

"At first, I was not pleased by the interference of Morgan in the lives of the Pack," Uhlmethan continued. "Morgan should not have led the People away from the old Pack Ground. They should have stayed, and fought the Mindkillers, the natural prey of their kind. But, because Morgan came to the Pack, you two have been favored with unusual mental power, an incursion of Amberite blood. Surely, you should bring this power back to your people, instead of abandoning them, like Morgan."

"What about Eric?" Siggan asked.

Uhlmethan smiled. "If you follow me, *I* will take care of Eric."

Siggan smiled too, a predatory smile. She would like to see Eric pay for the way he threw his weight around. "That might be... most entertaining."

At this point, the King asked Siggan whether she would like to dance again. She assented, and the King led her away. Uhlmethan continued, for another few minutes, to encourage Stormbringer to return to the Pack, and lead them back to the old Pack Ground. Then, the Demon Lord took his leave.

Siggan enjoyed the dancing very much. And, during the next slow dance, she took the opportunity to say to Gerian, "You have remarkable guests."

Gerian smiled at her. "Yes," he agreed. "I make everyone welcome to my kingdom. It's the best way to preserve Buchella's autonomy: this place has become neutral ground. Its' a place where people of all sides can meet, and so no one wants to see it destroyed or changed." Gerian looked at Siggan gravely. "Unfortunately, none of these powerful guests can really be trusted."

"Uhlmethan, for example?"

Gerian shrugged slightly. "I'm sure he'll always work for his own advantage, above anyone else's."

"What advantage can he gain from persuading Stormbringer and me to return to the Pack?"

"He would remove you from the picture."

"And gain what?"

"This is speculation, of course. But many of the Lords of Chaos seem to be interested in Morgan. Somehow, a great deal of power is being generated by this situation, with Morgan in his weakened state, and a number of the Amberites pursuing him."

The ball was a marvelous experience for Siggan. Toward the end of it, she sought out her brother.

"Have you been asked to stay the night?" she asked him.

He nodded. "Several ladies have invited me to stay. But I think I'll go back to the hotel. What about you?"

"I feel sure the King is going to ask me to stay. Don't be surprised if you don't see me till tomorrow."

"Have a good time, Sis. I'm going now."

He left. But Siggan remained with the King. Gerian did not disappoint her... in any way.

It was the night of the royal ball, in more ways than one. When the dance was over, Siggan and King Gerian went to Gerian's bedroom, and spent most of the night making love. It was fantastic, but tiring. Toward morning, they fell happily asleep in each other's arms.

Storm wasn't having quite so much fun. Despite offers from several ladies, he hadn't felt like staying overnight in Gerian's palace. So he went back to the area of Vincent's Inn, and began to simply wander the crowded night streets of Buchella.

After awhile, he noticed that most of the passers-by were men. And many of them were very strangely garbed, even for Buchella. They wore what seemed to be women's clothes, mostly very glitzy. Sequins, bugle beads, and five inch heels were much in evidence.

As Storm strolled along, taking in the parade of glitter, a man walked up to him. The man was big and blond, dressed in a green satin outfit and heavy eye makeup.

"Goodbye," said Storm, without giving the man a chance to speak.

But Storm wasn't fast enough, turning away. "Wait," cried the man in green. "You're Stormbringer? Whatcha doin' for the night, big fella?"

Storm repressed a slight shudder, and touched the blond man on the shoulder. A small mental command, and the blond man fell to the sidewalk, unconscious. Storm walked away, with a slight, satisfied smile.

But he hadn't gone a hundred yards, before a whole group of men barred his way. These were dressed in black leather, with metal studs.

For a moment, Storm thought the men were out to rob him. But their leader swaggered forward and said, "You Stormbringer? You wanna good time?"

Storm saw red. He picked the leader up bodily, and threw him at his followers, yelling, "Leave me alone, or I'll kick ass!"

All around, there was a sudden barrage of flashbulbs. Storm glared around at the sudden infestation of reporters. Where had they come from, without warning?

He glowered at them. But one reporter, bolder than the rest, hurried up to him, eyes aglow, nose for news twitching. "Mr. Stormbringer..."

Storm glared even harder. "Did you see what happened to the last guy?"

The reporter seemed to vanish into thin air.

Storm wandered on, angry. His mood was not improved when the newsboys for the Amber Chronicle started calling out, "Extra! Stormbringer assaults homosexual lover!"

Storm decided to experiment with his Amberite powers. He put up the Pattern around himself, and kept it there. He decided to see how long he could hold it.

Then, he tried to shift Shadow, so that he would find a bookstore. He found a bookstore, all right. But it didn't feel right, and he

suspected it would've been there anyway.

There was nothing very interesting in the bookstore. Everything was fiction, or newspapers. From what Storm had seen, the newspapers were often fictional, too. There were no histories of Buchella: nothing that would shed light on the essential nature of this strange place.

Storm's eye lit on a lurid paperback, titled, "Corwin's Adventures In Shadow". The cover showed a man who looked slightly like Corwin, with a sword in one hand and a battle ax in the other, stomping on a dead cat-thing, and preparing to fight a cutlass-wielding pirate. Storm bought the book, just for laughs.

He also bought a copy of the Chaos News/Herald, because there was a picture of Niemand, reaching down into a strange, glowing pool. The caption read, "Degaz at the Gateway Beyond The Universe."

He wandered around town for the rest of the night. It seemed that half the gay population of Buchella propositioned him, during those few hours. But at least they didn't come close enough to touch him. They must have read the papers.

Finally, Storm had an inspiration. He tried with all his might to shift Shadow so the gay Buchellans were gone.

Nice idea. Unfortunately, it didn't work.

He began to be concerned that his powers weren't working correctly. He tried a small experiment: it was not unlikely for someone to lose a wallet in this crowd. Storm worked at it, using an instinct all Amberites possess, making this occurrence more and *more* likely, until... yes! There was a wallet on the sidewalk.

Storm picked up the wallet, and opened it. He found that it belonged to Deanna, whom he'd seen several times since coming to Buchella.

There were a few passers-by who weren't gaudily dressed, and didn't appear to be cruising. Once, Storm stopped one of these, and asked for directions to Dworkin's Trump Shop.

"Don't know," said the man. "Hey, you're the guy in the papers."

"No," said Storm. "I'm just a look-alike."

"You sure do look like him. Stormbringer, The Fruit From Shadow."

Storm turned and walked away. All in all, it was a really lousy night. And after a while, on top of everything else, he got a headache from holding up the Pattern for so long.

Disgusted, Storm went back to his room at Vincent's about daybreak. There, he ate a truly monumental breakfast. By the time he finished eating, it was almost noon. But at least he felt better.

Siggan and Gerian enjoyed a few hours of deep, restful sleep, followed by a hearty breakfast. Both of them felt marvelous.

Siggan asked Gerian a number of questions, during breakfast, about politics, and the situation in Amber. But she learned little. Gerian seemed to interact with Amberites only when they happened to visit Buchella. *He* never went out looking for *them*.

Siggan decided to take a chance, and ask Gerian for help. She told him in some detail about her encounter with ex-King Eric of Amber. This had taken place right in Buchella, in Vincent's Inn. Eric had told Siggan and Storm that, when they next left Buchella, they must be prepared to serve him or die.

"I don't want to serve Eric," Siggan told Gerian. "I don't know what he'll want of me, but I suspect he wants to use me against my father. I don't want to be used to harm my parents, or the Pack. And I certainly don't want to hurt them for Eric's benefit. Is there, by any chance, a secret way out of Buchella, so I can avoid Eric when I leave?"

Gerian nodded soberly. "There is," he said. "And, if you want to leave, I'll help you. But I want you to know, you're welcome to stay."

Siggan shook her head sadly. "I don't know. That would certainly be a great pleasure, but I must consult with my brother. I suppose I should go and do that, and let you get on with your ruling."

"Why not stay?" said Gerian. "I could take the day off, and show you my kingdom. It would be my pleasure."

"And mine, equally," Siggan agreed, her mood lifting.

The morning was marvelous. Gerian gave her a whirlwind tour of Buchella, hitting all the high spots. Somehow, when he wanted to take her to a show, it was always just about to begin. For him (and thus for her) there was always room, always time, and never a schedule conflict. And above all other pleasures was the pleasure of just being together, and the marvelous intervals when they adjourned, once again, to the royal bedchamber.

When she got the Trump call from Stormbringer, Siggan was sitting next to Gerian in a theater, watching a live performance of a play called "Camelot".

Stormbringer was now eager to leave Buchella, at once. Even the fear of Eric did little to restrain him. 'I can fly,' he thought to Siggan. 'Eric can't.'

'That's all very well,' Siggan thought back. 'But what about arrows and such?'

She told Storm about Gerian's offer of a secret exit. They tried to consider all their options carefully.

They could make a run for it, out the front gate. They could take Gerian's secret way. They could go with Uhlmethan, who wanted

them to return to the ancestral Pack Ground and fight the Mind Killers... but neither of them really trusted Uhlmethan. They could try again to find Dworkin. They could stay... but this last, Storm flatly refused to consider.

And, once out, assuming they managed to avoid Eric, should they continue to hunt for Niemand? Should they rejoin the Pack? Should they find Harlan and deliver Dworkin's letter, *without* rejoining the Pack?

Siggan waited for intermission, and asked Gerian to call Niemand to Buchella. After all, she reasoned, he had called Uhlmethan.

But Gerian only shook his head. "I didn't call Uhlmethan. I never call anyone to Buchella; they come as the spirit moves them."

Disappointed, Siggan waited for Storm's return call, which soon came. 'He can't help by calling Niemand,' she reported. 'Suppose you and I raise the Pattern, and try to use it to call Niemand.'

'We can't call out of Buchella that way,' Storm answered. 'What I'd really like is to find Dworkin. But I've looked all night, and I can't find him. I think, after he gave you that letter for Harlan, he must've left.'

'I'll give it a try myself, a bit later,' Siggan promised. 'Just promise you won't leave Buchella without calling me first.'

'All right.'

That was it, for the moment. But, a few hours later, Stormbringer called back.

'Sis, I've been thinking about Eric,' Storm told Siggan. 'I've decided I don't want to try getting by him.'

'Hmmm, so have I. Dworkin told me Eric would teach me much. I wonder what it would be.'

'Sis, you're not thinking of meeting with Eric?'

'I'm not sure. What I really want is to stay with Gerian, until I figure out what to do next.'

Storm warned her, in the strongest terms, not to meet with Eric. He dwelt on Eric's powers, known and suspected, at some length.

'All right, Storm,' she agreed finally. 'I'm impressed. Yeah, I really am.' She sighed. 'I wonder what Dworkin would teach me, if I could find him again.'

'What happened with Dworkin, anyway?' Storm asked.

Siggan opened her mind to Storm, recalling her encounter with Dworkin in detail.

When he had gone through the whole meeting with Dworkin, Stormbringer mused for a moment, and sent, 'Well, before we go, I'm going to at least pick up something.'

'Where? What?'

'A sword.'

'What sword? Where will you get it?'

'A more destructive sword, so I'll be better prepared to defend myself.'

'More destructive. How? A magical sword? A Pattern-activated sword?'

'What about Niemand?' Storm asked, changing the subject. 'Do you still want to find him?'

Siggan mostly wanted, just then, to stay with Gerian. But, Niemand could be in trouble. And she had accepted Dworkin's letter to Harlan.

'Yes, I still want to find him,' she answered. 'Storm, don't leave Buchella, not yet. Wait for me. Wait till I can politely get away from King Gerian. I want to try to find Dworkin's Shop. If I can't, if he's gone, perhaps I'll go with you.'

Storm agreed to this, and cut the contact.

Watching another entertainment at Gerian's side, Siggan wondered about Eric. Why was Eric so concerned about Jaeger? Jaeger was King of the Land of the Dead, and Eric was dead. Was it simply a matter of currying favor? Why had Jaeger burned out Eric's eyes? And how could Siggan destroy the King of the Land of the Dead, even with a Trap-Trump? Imprison him, maybe, but Eric had said 'destroy'.

What did Siggan know about Jaeger? Jaeger had committed incest with Nara, his sister. From their union, Harlan had been born, and Nara and Jaeger had been banished to the Land of the Dead by Oberon. On a journey through the Land of the Dead, Siggan's father Morgan had killed Nara. Harlan was now traveling with Morgan. And, Dworkin had given Siggan an important package for Harlan.

How were these events all hooked up together? If Siggan could achieve a coherent picture, she might know whom to befriend, and whom to treat as an enemy. But she simply didn't have enough information.

Meanwhile, Stormbringer once again wandered the streets of Buchella. By now, every Buchellan seemed to've heard the slander about Storm's sex life. No one would come within arm's length of him.

Discouraged, Storm felt a need to reassure himself that his powers still worked. So he found a flagpole, and made lightning strike it. That felt good: he still had some power left!

Feeling more confident, he went back to his room and called Siggan again. He insisted the time had come to leave Buchella, *immediately*.

'I can't leave right now, Storm, not in the middle of a show,' she said. 'There are matters of politeness to consider.'

'We've clearly overstayed our welcome.'

'*I* clearly have *not* overstayed *my* welcome, Brother. Let me stay long enough to be polite. We are guests here, and may want to return one day. I would rather be welcome here than not.'

Siggan's pleading softened Storm's resolve. He agreed. But he let her know he would *not* stay in Buchella much longer.

Contact broken, Storm considered what to while waiting for Siggan. He considered doing drugs--it should be safe enough here--but decided not to. He decided, instead, to look for a magic shop.

He wandered about a bit, without finding one. Finally, a Buchellan came up to him, and said, "Pardon me, my name is Bernie. You look like you're looking for something. Can I help?"

Storm looked the man over carefully. There was no hint in Bernie's manner of an attempted pickup.

"I'm looking for a magician," Storm told Bernie.

"Yeah? My cousin Bert is a magician, the best in Buchella. Do you know magic?"

"A little."

Bernie produced a dove from somewhere, made a few passes with his hands, and plucked a card from behind Storm's ear. "How's that for magic?"

"No, no," said Storm impatiently. "That's not the kind of magic I mean. Is there a school around here, where I can learn magic?"

"What kind of magic do you want to learn?" asked Bernie. "Most schools around here teach magic. There's escape magic, like being tied up in a trunk and thrown in the river, and getting yourself out, and then there's..."

"Can you make yourself invisible?" Storm interrupted.

Bernie clapped his hands, and he was invisible. He reappeared in a different place. He did this again and again, till Storm grew tired of seeing the same trick over and over. Irritated, Storm summoned up the Pattern. Bernie reappeared, and stayed put.

"How was *that*? Pretty good, huh?" Bernie boasted.

In spite of himself, Storm was a little impressed. "How long did it take you to learn magic?" he asked.

"I've been studying all my life," said Bernie. "What do you think, you can just do it like that?" he asked, snapping his fingers.

He pulled out a match book, and showed it to Storm. The match book was printed with an advertisement: "LEARN MAGIC IN YOUR SPARE TIME". There was a number to call.

"But, I wouldn't really trust these people," said Bernie judiciously. "They're kind of a schlock outfit."

"I can believe that," said Storm. "What else can you do?"

"I can make fireballs, and—"

"You can?" Storm interrupted excitedly. "I'd like to learn some

more. Maybe I could learn from you."

So Storm and Bernie went off together, to Bernie's magic shop.

The shop was full of magicians' paraphernalia: ventriloquists' dummies, magic rings, and other props.

"Where did you learn your magic?" Storm asked, looking around.

"Everywhere," said Bernie. "Learned some of it from my parents, some from friends, even some from a correspondence course. And of course, I studied magic in high school. We take it like shop, or any other skill or craft we want to study."

"Magic in the high schools?" Storm asked. "Are there apprenticeships, like for the skilled trades?"

"No," Bernie replied. "As kids, we mostly learn how to control it. We learn to do safe, simple things, like, uh, how not to kill your classmates. It's in high school that we learn the real stuff: invisibility, fireballs, and all that stuff. Some folks do Pattern spells, or Logrus stuff. I do a little, but not much."

"I'm fascinated," said Storm. "My father knows a lot of magic, but he didn't really teach us much."

Bernie nodded. "So what you need is a course in remedial magic. Hey, I'd better tell you, I can't guarantee any of this will work, once you're outside Buchella."

"Maybe it won't. But, maybe it will. I'd like to learn some of it, anyway."

"Great. What would you like to learn?"

"Uh... how about that invisibility spell?"

"That'll cost you 130 gold pieces."

"No problem." Storm gave Bernie the money, and Bernie consulted a book of instructions.

Presently, Bernie was coaching Storm through the process. "Concentrate on being invisible," he said. "Bend the light so it passes right through your body. When it's focused, bam! You're invisible." Bernie demonstrated.

Storm reached, out trying to find the invisible Bernie. Bernie reappeared abruptly, frowning.

"You're not my type," said Bernie.

Storm was angry, not at Bernie, but at the lousy Buchellan newspaper industry. "It's not like that," he tried to explain. "I just wanted to touch you, so I could feel the essence of the spell."

"Well... I'm not sure I wanna do *that*, either," Bernie declined. "Just give the spell a try. You can do it."

"Okay." Storm concentrated, focused, and -- it worked! He looked down, and couldn't even see himself.

"It can't be this easy," said Storm. "You're funning me."

"No I'm not. Now, do it the opposite way."

Storm reversed the process. Sure enough, he became visible

again. He was overjoyed.

"Practice every day, now, so you've got the right kind of concentration," Bernie cautioned.

Storm was thrilled, amazed. He wanted more. "How about a Pattern spell?"

"What spell do you want?"

"Uh -- a spell to dispel Pattern?"

"No problem. That'll be another 130."

Storm paid eagerly. "How do you do it?"

"Picture the person or place as normal, natural, without all those Pattern energies around. Think about some Amberite, say, Oberon, and... SQUISH!"

Storm had been holding up the Pattern all day, without much thinking about it. But he noticed, abruptly, that the Pattern was gone from his mind. Bernie had apparently done the spell, and it had worked.

"Wow. Can you change it back?"

"No problem." As suddenly as it had vanished, the Pattern returned.

Storm loved this kind of magic. He and Bernie worked on Storm's two spells, all the rest of the afternoon and into the evening.

Meanwhile, Siggan spent the afternoon and evening with Gerian. It was all wonderful, but the last part was the best, back in Gerian's bedchamber. How could she bear to leave him?

But then... Niemand. Harlan. Dworkin.

With a deep sigh, she said, "Gerian, I'm sorry, but I can't stay tonight. I want to -- oh, so much. But there are some things I really have to do. I'll be in touch, but for now, I really have to go."

Gerian smiled gently. "Of course you do. Please remember, when your business is done, that my time is completely at your disposal."

They shared one last kiss. And then Siggan left.

She went back to her suite at Vincent's Inn. She went down to the trash room, rolled her clothes into a pack, grasped them, and shape-changed into a hawk. Then she flew out the window, as she had done once before, to explore Buchella.

As Siggan flew out, a storm of flashbulbs went off around her. Vultures! She flew quickly, to get away from them.

Siggan retraced her old route to Dworkin's Trump Shop. But the shop wasn't there. She flew a methodical spiral search of the whole area. But the shop was truly gone.

Disappointed, she flew back to Vincent's. Resuming her human form, and her clothing, she went back to her room to relax and think.

After a time, she knew what she had to do.

She tried to get in touch with Gerian, using psychic power. But, the short-range nature of psyche defeated her. If Gerian had been a wolf... but, as far as Siggan knew, he was simply a normal human. Though an immensely able and attractive one...

No time for daydreaming now. She picked up the phone and called him, flattered to note that she was put through at once.

"Is there a Pattern in Buchella?" Siggan asked.

"No," Gerian answered.

"Then, my brother and I will visit you later, if we may?"

"You are always welcome here, with or without your brother."

Siggan smiled. "Thank you. Goodbye."

"Goodbye."

Siggan hung up, and made a Trump call to Stormbringer. She found him with Bernie.

'Storm, I tried to find Dworkin's Shop, but it's gone,' she told him. 'We might as well go too; I propose we go together.'

'I guess so. I'm learning magic. Clap-magic: I just clap my hands, and I can become invisible. Clap again, and I can dispel Pattern. I'm not sure it will work outside Buchella, that's the only problem.'

'That's great, Storm. But, you wanted to leave. Are you still willing?'

'Yeah, I guess that would be best. I'll come back to the Inn.'

'Don't bother. I'll get your things and your horse. Meet me in front of the Palace.'

'Okay.'

Siggan broke the contact, and went to pack.

Meanwhile, Storm had one last question for Bernie.

"At the Inn where I'm staying, there's one view out the door, and a completely different one out the window. How do they do that?"

"Just a simple bending of multidimensional space," Bernie explained airily. "You want me to teach you that, too?"

"I'd like to know more, but I don't have the time right now," said Storm. "Thanks for the lessons. So long."

"So long. Drop in again."

So Storm left Bernie's magic shop, and went to Gerian's palace. Sure enough, in a few minutes Siggan arrived, with their horses and gear.

They walked up the driveway, and were met at the front door by Gerian himself. None of the servants were around. In fact, there were no passers-by. This, while odd in Buchella, was convenient, and Siggan assumed Gerian must have arranged it for privacy.

"I have to leave," Siggan told Gerian sadly. "I have to find Niemand. Can you show us the way out now?"

Gerian nodded. Turning back into the hallway, he picked up a newspaper from a small table by the door.

"By latest report, both Niemand and Morgan have passed through the Gateway to the Beyond," he said.

"You... you wouldn't have any Trumps of them, would you?" Siggan asked.

"I'm sorry, no," Gerian replied.

"Then -- then show us the way now, please."

Gerian nodded. He opened his arms, in a gesture eloquent with power. Slowly the driveway moved, forming itself into a spiral of glowing rocks, like the one that had been Siggan's and Storm's original stairway to Buchella.

Siggan moved forward impulsively, and hugged the King. She gloried in one last feel of his warm arms around her. They kissed, and Siggan thought she would never be able to let go. But finally she did.

"Come back any time," said Gerian, his deep voice rough with passion and sorrow.

Then the King turned to Storm, with a friendly smile. "Goodbye, Stormbringer. You also are welcome to return."

Storm thanked him... though returning to Buchella was not high on Storm's list, just then.

Sorrowfully, Siggan mounted her horse and rode off, down the ramp of glowing rocks. Storm followed.

They made their way down the long spiral ramp of free-floating, blue-and-green stones. Hopefully, the ramp would lead them to the Gate Beyond the Universe, as Gerian had promised. They were Amberites, and not particularly trusting... but it was a chance to find their missing Pack.

As they guided their horses onto the ramp, Uncle Siggan trotted after them. Apparently, dead or not, the old wolf could leave Buchella.

"It would be nice if people who were dead would stay in the Land of the Dead," Storm remarked sourly.

Siggan glared at him. "What do you mean?" she demanded sharply. "I like having Uncle around."

"I don't mind having Uncle Siggan here," Storm defended himself. "But Eric is another story." He shrugged. "I guess what I really mean is, I wish my *enemies* would stay in the Land of the Dead. Oh well. Can't have everything."

Siggan was mollified. *She* wished Eric would stay in the Land of the Dead, too. At least, there was no sign of him.

Behind and above, the music of Buchella faded. There came a

silence, broken only by the clopping of hooves.

They scanned the ground below them. Mostly, there was only a featureless, yellow-brown plain. But in one direction, there was a ridge, with what looked like a pile of ruins on top. And the ramp seemed to be taking them right to the ruins.

"The Gate must be there," Storm remarked.

"Don't assume that 'gate' means a literal gate," Siggan cautioned. "Gate can mean dimensional gate. Who knows what it meant to this thing's makers?"

They came to the foot of the stone spiral. As their horses struck out onto bare, sandy earth, the spiral began to fade away. In seconds, it was gone. There remained only sky, and earth, and the ruins.

Storm summoned up the Pattern, and used it as a lens to examine the ruins. They still looked just the same as before. "I don't get any kind of feeling from this place," he said. "No power or anything. It just looks old."

"Let's go up there," Siggan suggested.

The ridge, at that point, had a slope of about thirty degrees. The horses could handle it. So they rode up, watching the ruins.

"I don't see any writing or images," Siggan remarked. "But the stones are so weathered. Anything might have been written on them, once, and we'd never know. Say, what's that?"

Storm squinted. "Looks like a lump of rags, or something, between us and the ruins."

"It does, doesn't it? I don't like that. I have the feeling it might change into something else, as we get nearer. What does it look like through the Pattern, Storm?"

"No different. Let's go closer."

"Why do you want to do that? What if it's like one of those monsters in the Land of the Dead?"

They considered for a few moments, and finally decided to veer around the ragpile. It was possible to get to the gate of the ruins while staying at least a hundred feet away from the rags. So that's what they did. When they got to the ruins, they looked back, and the pile of rags was gone, replaced by a rock. Had they mistaken the rock for a ragpile?

Close up, the ruins seemed a bit more structured. At least, nothing that hadn't already fallen seemed about to fall. There was an arch, and beyond it a staircase, leading down into darkness.

"I have a torch in my pack," Storm said. He rummaged. "No, I don't. Hey, the Pattern didn't work!"

"You tried to use the Pattern to bring you a torch?"

"Yeah."

Siggan frowned suspiciously. "Then the Pattern doesn't work

here. I don't like that. Before we go down there in that darkness, I want to be sure that's not the Land of the Dead again."

"We're a long, long way from the only entrance I've ever heard of," Storm reminded her.

"Do we know how many entrances it has?" countered Siggan.

"No. But we're not going to find out if it is, standing up here. So, why don't you dig out my Trump, and pull me out if I get in trouble?"

"Okay."

Storm dismounted, and felt his way carefully down the stairs. Uncle Siggan padded after him. After a while, Storm thought he saw light ahead. He continued downward, and found himself in a large, round room, with radiating tunnels. There was a glowing pool of water at the room's center. This was the source of the light.

"Hey, Sis!" he called. "There's a pool of glowing water down here. Looks just like the one Niemand was about to touch, in a picture I saw in the Chaos News/Herald. Why don't you make a Trump contact, so you can see it too?"

Siggan had a distrust of Buchellan journalism. Still, she was somewhat reassured. She concentrated on her brother's Trump, reaching for him.

Meanwhile, below, Uncle Siggan had begun sniffing around. Suddenly he stopped, near the mouth of one of the tunnels. His hackles rose, and he began to growl.

Storm didn't notice, because he was getting a Trump call. He opened his mind, expecting to feel Siggan. But there was nobody there -- only a darkness.

He tried to break the contact. The darkness was more powerful, psychically, than he. It wouldn't let him cut the contact. In fact, it began pulling him into itself.

Still having the Pattern up, Storm tried to use it to cut the contact. This had no effect.

Uncle Siggan left the mouth of the tunnel and raced toward Storm. Eagerly, Storm opened his mind, and reached to touch Uncle's fur. When they touched, Storm was blasted by the agony of the Land of the Dead.

It worked. Storm was knocked senseless, and the contact was cut.

Meanwhile, Siggan was getting only a busy signal. She heard a terrible scream of pain: Storm's voice. Quickly, she urged her horse down the dark steps. It didn't want to go, but she whispered to it, and touched it, and it went.

Siggan entered the room of the glowing pool, to see Storm lying unconscious. Uncle Siggan stood over him.

Siggan dismounted, and went to her brother's side. After a few minutes, she managed to revive him.

"I'm still here," were Storm's first words. "I was worried, just for a second." He was describing the psychic darkness, when Uncle began to growl again, at the same tunnel mouth.

"We'd better go through this Gate, here," said Storm, gesturing to the pool. "I'm going up to get my horse."

He ran up the stairway, leaving Siggan alone by the pool.

"Thanks!" she called after him sarcastically. Uncle's growls made a low tone of menace in the chamber.

Siggan mounted her horse once more. "Uncle, come here!" she called. The old wolf moved to her side. The two of them stood tensely, watching the tunnels, especially the one Uncle had growled at. He continued to grow more and more agitated.

Fortunately, Storm came back quickly, leading his horse. He hurried to Siggan and Uncle at the edge of the pool.

"Take my hand, and hold onto Uncle," Storm said quickly. "Keep your mind closed, and you'll be all right."

After a slight hesitation, Siggan obeyed, leaning far down in the saddle to get a grip in Uncle's ruff. Fortunately, he was a big wolf. Sure enough, Siggan was fine.

"But, wait a second --"

Siggan's words came too late. Storm had stabbed a hand into the glowing water.

They were on an earthen ridge, under a strange, dark sky with lights.

Storm's horse and Uncle Siggan had appeared on the path at the ridge's top. But Siggan's horse was on the slope that seemed to stretch down towards nothing. Finding itself on an incline, it panicked.

Siggan tried to hold the horse steady, encouraging it to climb onto the path. But it was spirited and high-strung, and it reared, and started to fall.

Siggan leaped, and managed to gain the path. But the horse skidded, screaming, into the darkness. And, after a few moments, its scream was cut off. There was only silence.

Stormbringer reached out and took Siggan's shoulder, and Uncle pressed his nose into her cheek.

"I can feel my horse's mind," Storm reported worriedly. "This place is hurting it, somehow. I think it's dying."

Siggan looked up—and was transfixed.

"Those lights in the sky are Patterns!" she said, awed. Look at that one..."

She fixed her attention on one of the Pattern-lights, concentrating in an effort to understand how this strange thing

could be. Somehow, it drew her to itself. And suddenly, they were somewhere else again.

They were in a forest, beside a strange-looking path. The path was about three feet wide, made of some unfamiliar black material.

"Siggan, what did you do?" Storm demanded.

"I don't know," she said. "I just sort of concentrated, and..." She trailed off, with a shrug.

"At least my horse seems to be okay now. Do you have any idea where we're at?"

"I have no idea. However, if your horse has revived, this can't be too bad a place. At least, it's more hospitable to life."

Siggan put one foot on the path's black surface, and felt a strange humming through the sole of her foot. "Storm, this is interesting," she said. "This road hums."

Storm touched the path with one hand. Sure enough, there was a vibration. He shape-shifted into a hawk, and flew up to get a bird's eye view.

Siggan followed mentally, finding it much easier than normal to maintain a psychic link.

The landscape was lovely, lightly wooded, with clearings at various points. In one direction, Storm could see a range of rolling hills. Far away, among the hills, was a town. It looked very clean, with sharp, clean lines, the buildings all in rich shades of blue.

Storm returned to the ground, and resumed his own shape. "I think that town is the way we should go," he said. "Let's follow the path."

"Interesting," said Siggan. "Blue is one of my colors. I'll take that as a good omen, along with the survival of your horse. Okay, let's go."

She stepped on the path with both feet. Now, she could feel the hum as music, fairly complex. There was a rhythm -- a steady, running kind of beat. She began to run in time to the beat. The path's surface was springy, perfect for running.

Stormbringer saw Siggan running, and heard the path's music through their psychic link. It seemed to him that the path had laid a compulsion on his sister. He knew that he could run faster than Siggan, but on reflection he changed back into a hawk, instead. He flew after Siggan, quickly overtook her, and knocked her off the path with a sweep of his powerful wings.

Siggan screamed at him in irritation. 'I was having fun!' she sent an angry thought. 'It felt good! Why did you do that?'

'Well, it was *making* you run," Storm thought back. 'I don't mind running, but -- there was a kind of compulsion, that --'

'*Making* me run? That's nonsense! Storm, you're seeing demons where there are no demons. Now let me go. Just follow me, huh? Why don't you ride your own horse, as they say?'

'I left it back there, with my clothes. Don't get back on the road yet. Why did you go running off, anyway? Why didn't you wait for me?'

'Because it felt so good,' she answered impatiently. 'I figured you'd shape-change in an instant, and since you had a horse you'd be faster anyway.'

'Right, Sis. See you. Do you know where we are?'

'No, but we agreed we're going to the city, and I'm running towards it.'

'I thought you wanted *me* to be cautious.' With this parting shot, Storm flew back to his horse, became human, put on his clothes, and came riding back toward Siggan.

Meanwhile, Siggan heard began to hear a pounding, as of many, many feet running along the road. The sound seemed to come from the city. After a few moments, a crowd of people came into view, running along the path.

The people, both men and women, wore green garments with short skirts. They were not fleeing: they seemed to run for the joy of it, their bodies glowing with healthy sweat.

'You see?' Siggan thought to Storm. 'Everybody does it here. It's perfectly normal.'

'O.K., it's fine. But don't run off.'

'Well then, hurry up and get here.' Siggan was chafing to be off. She hadn't felt so good in ages.

Stormbringer gave his horse a mental command to follow him, and ran back toward Siggan. He liked to run, too. It was only the path that bothered him.

"If you want to run, run," he called.

"O.K., let's do it!" she shouted. And she jumped on the path, and took off like an arrow.

They raced a bit. Storm won, as usual. Then they settled down to an easy lope, not wishing to become tired before reaching the city.

The horse fell far behind them. The poor creature hadn't been built to compete with Amberites. But Storm knew it would follow, in obedience to his psychic command, and catch up with them later.

The woods thinned out. Soon they were running through croplands.

After a while, the path forked. One fork continued toward the city. But the other curved off toward a cluster of blue buildings. It seemed like a small compound area, with barns.

They took the fork, curious about the compound. There was a wooden wall around the buildings, but the path entered through an

opening. They ran in.

The center of the compound was a big, clear area. It was full (though not crowded) with people, who seemed to be having fun. Dogs barked, and children shouted in play. The dogs got very agitated when Uncle Siggan entered their yard, and a number of the humans stopped to stare rather blankly at the newcomers.

"Mommy, Mommy!" shouted a little boy. "They're running the wrong way!"

His mother hushed him, in the manner mothers have when small children blurt out impolite truths.

A man walked over to Siggan and Stormbringer. "Why are you running *that* way?" he asked curiously.

"Actually, we're newcomers to your area," said Storm. "What's the name of that city over there?"

"Capital?"

"Oh, it's the capital?"

"Well, that's what it's called... Capital."

"Why did you say we were running 'the wrong way'?" asked Siggan.

"Remember the people we saw?" Storm reminded his sister. "They were all running the other way."

"This is the southbound circuit," said the man who'd greeted them.

"This is a running track? Not just a road on which people run?" asked Siggan.

"Where are you from?" asked the man, seeming very puzzled.

"Far away," they both said, almost in chorus.

"Excuse me." The man turned away, grabbed a passing teenager by the arm, and whispered in his ear.

"What is this place?" asked Siggan.

"This is Farm Number 16," said the man.

"Who rules here?" she pursued.

The man stared at her. "I beg your pardon?"

"Who rules here? Do you have a council, a king, a governor? Who rules here?"

"Huh?"

"Who's in charge?" Stormbringer amplified. "What's the name of the person who's in charge of this place? The mayor, ministry, tribal leader?"

By now, several people were watching this exchange. All of the locals looked totally puzzled.

"Who makes sure that you get services?" asked Siggan.

"Which service?" The man was still at a loss.

"Well, the place looks clean, somebody keeps it clean."

"Of course. Everybody keeps it clean."

"Nobody picks up garbage?"

"Recycling... yeah."

"Who supervises the recycling? What about police, to protect you from crime?"

"Why would recyclers need a supervisor?"

"What about schools? How do you educate your children?"

"What? What are you talking about?"

"Who teaches your children the things they need to know? Do you teach your own children?"

"Huh?!"

"These are all things that governments do. What about the military? Don't you have an army, to protect you?"

Suddenly, most of the locals started running away. The man Siggan was talking to started backing away from her.

"Oh! Uh... if you'll excuse me just a minute, I'll go see if there's somebody around who can talk to you about this. Can you wait here just a few minutes?"

He hurried away. *Everybody* hurried away, some pausing to grab young children and hustle them out of sight. In under a minute, Siggan, Storm and Uncle were alone.

"Well, we blew that one," Siggan remarked.

"Let's head for the city," said Storm. "We'll probably find out more there."

"No, let's wait a moment," Siggan suggested. "Let's see if they do send anyone."

"I don't think anyone's going to come out. But we can wait a minute. I wonder if there's a well around here?"

After a moment, Storm noticed there were faucets on the sides of the buildings. He trotted over and got a drink.

A strange, humming music grew in the air. It came from the direction of the city, but it was up in the sky. Storm trotted back to Siggan, and they stood looking upward.

After a moment, a large, light-blue plane hummed into sight, driven by propellers. It was coming in for a landing.

Siggan watched curiously, sending up a psychic probe. What she found startled her.

"Storm, take cover!" she shouted. "That thing's out to get us!" She sprinted to the lee of one of the buildings. There were some windows almost level with the ground, leading down into some kind of basement. Quickly, she smashed one of the windows and dived for cover.

Storm followed her, and crouched by the building, trying to summon the Pattern. It came up... sort of. It was remarkably puny and weak.

"Can you reach into the minds of the people on that plane, and

tell them to go away?" Storm asked.

Siggan reached out psychically, to the people on the airplane. There seemed to be about thirty of them. "We are your friends," she told them. Why do you wish to harm us?

"Just send them away," Storm said.

The crew of the airplane felt Siggan's psychic probe, and started screaming. "Oh my God, psychic warfare! NOOO!" yelled the pilot. He did something to the control panel in front of him.

There was a huge explosion. Thirty minds snuffed out, like sparks falling into water. Pieces of airplane rained down for a few moments.

Siggan reeled: it wasn't as bad as opening her mind in the Land of the Dead, but it wasn't fun, either.

"Well, I guess that's taken care of," said Storm, with a kind of grim flippancy. "Nice job, Siggan. I didn't mean you to destroy the plane."

"I didn't mean to," she said. "They panicked, and pushed some kind of self-destruct."

"They blew *themselves* up?" Storm asked blankly.

"Yes. *I* wouldn't have willed that on them. I don't even know anything about them. I just wanted to find out why they were after us."

"Are you *sure* you didn't do this, Siggan? I never knew you to be bloodthirsty, but..."

"I'm quite sure. Storm, I'm not bloodthirsty against somebody who hasn't harmed me yet."

"I don't know if we want to go to the city," said Storm thoughtfully. "I don't think we're going to learn anything from the people now."

"We'd better be wary, whatever we do. This place looks like a paradise, but I'm not sure it is. You know, Storm, there are places like this that I've heard about from Daddy, called Utopias, where all the people are kept happy, but the government is in fact awful. This has every smell of one of those. Why do we want to go to the city?"

"You have anyplace else in mind?"

"Yeah. I wonder --"

She broke off. The path had started making an odd, musical booming noise.

"Do you feel any danger?" Storm asked.

Siggan cast around. "There are no minds left in this compound," she reported. "Everyone seems to have fled."

"Let's get out of this compound, fast," Storm said urgently. "Siggan, hurry up, let's go."

Siggan scrambled up out of the basement. They'd taken a dislike to the path, so they vaulted over the compound wall, which was only

about six feet high. Uncle Siggan followed, and the three of them started running toward the nearest woods, about a mile and a half away.

They'd gone about half a mile, when Siggan panted, "Storm! There's a twelve-foot-tall man, in plastic plate armor, rolling along the road on a skateboard. It'd be funny, but he has this enormous rifle. Oh, shit, there are *four* of them!"

They redoubled their efforts to run faster. One of the armored men aimed his weapon at the fleeing Amberites, and fired a grenade.

Storm, who still had the Pattern up, tried to make the grenade explode in flight. Nothing happened. He and Siggan split up, starting to zig-zag across the fields.

The grenade changed its course to follow Siggan.

Storm threw his knife at the grenade, which veered in flight to meet the weapon. The two collided, and the grenade blew with a tremendous BOOM! Both Siggan and Storm were knocked over.

Storm next tried to alter probability to jam the weapons of the armored men. But again, nothing happened.

Siggan jumped to her feet and ran for the forest, which was still a mile ahead. She tried to imagine a wall between herself and the soldiers, willing it to become real, with all the power of the children of Amber to make real the things they imagine. This would involve moving through Shadow, But moving away from that place was hardly a problem for her just then.

The wall did not appear and the armored men remained present. She could not seem to move through Shadow. The powers of Amber were not potent in this place. And more grenades were flying.

A grenade was pursuing Storm. Quickly, he envisioned a water pipe, buried in the ground, which could explode and obstruct the grenade with its fragments. But again, nothing happened.

Storm had another knife. He snatched it from its sheath, and threw it at the grenade. As before, the missile veered to meet the knife, and both knife and grenade were annihilated with a BOOM!

Two grenades were arching toward Siggan. She drew her Colt .45, and shot at the flying grenades. This was successful: both grenades were destroyed. How handy to have targets that veered to meet her shots!

On the other hand, that left only five shots in the weapon. She couldn't go on like that very long.

Siggan and Storm ran as fast as they could, which was considerable. But they couldn't outrun the grenades.

Storm reached back with his mind, and touched the mind of a soldier. At once, the soldier screamed, "Ahhh! It's in my mind!" And the soldier next in line whirled and shot his own comrade,

right through the head.

Siggan felt what Storm was doing. She also reached out and contacted a soldier. She wanted to make him shoot the other soldiers.

The result was the same. The soldier Siggan had grabbed screamed a warning to the others, and they blew him away.

Meanwhile, no one was shooting at Siggan or Storm, and they were able to advance within half a mile of the woods. That was the good news. The bad news was that another four soldiers came rolling along the road. That made six.

Siggan felt that three of the soldiers were about to fire. She reached out for their minds, hoping to halve the numbers of the enemy force.

But, as she grappled with the three soldiers' minds, one of their comrades fired a grenade at Storm.

Instinctively, he tried to shift Shadow away from it. It only took him about a second to remember that it wouldn't work. But by then, the grenade was almost on him.

Frantically, he picked up a clod of dirt and threw it at the grenade. He hit it, and the grenade blew—mere feet from Stormbringer. The blast knocked him end over end, blood spurting. He fell heavily, and didn't get up.

Siggan was now the target of two more grenades. She shot both of them, but she lost her hold on the minds of the other three soldiers. She couldn't concentrate on psychic functions under these conditions. And then, out of the corner of her eye, she saw Storm fall. He looked dead, but he still emitted a trace of psyche.

She grabbed him, and sprinted for the trees. Luckily, most of the enemy seemed to be reloading their weapons. What followed seemed like an eternity of running and panting, but suddenly Siggan was in the forest.

Her psychic scan told her Storm's heart was not beating, and his breathing had stopped. She threw him to the ground, and started doing CPR. Pump the chest five times. Stop, and force a breath into Storm's lungs. Five pumps and a breath. Five pumps and a breath. She was maintaining the tiny spark of life. But he was still bleeding badly, and the internal injuries were massive.

She was losing him.

She thought frantically. There seemed to be no Pattern in this place at all. But their psychic powers were functional. Quickly, she reached into his mind and began shape-shifting him. Once before, she had discovered she could do this when he was unconscious.

It wasn't easy to do delicate mental work and CPR at the same time. But Stormbringer's mind was very familiar with the simple shift to wolf form, so she did that. A strong, completely healthy

wolf...

Once she got it started, it went quickly. In seconds, she was kneeling over her brother's furred form, watching him breathe under his own power. There was still some damage, but all essential organs were operating. Thank the Gods!

Of course, he was still weak, and also still unconscious.

Quickly, Siggan reloaded her Colt .45. As she shoved in the clip, there was an explosion about twenty meters to her right. She picked Storm up, threw him over her shoulder, and ran.

Just in time. The clearing where she had knelt exploded, just as she got clear. The shock wave knocked her forward. She jumped up and ran, zig- zagging on the assumption that the next one would arrive on a line with the first two.

Good thought. Sure enough, another one trashed the area further along the line. But by that time, she and Storm were out of range of all but a few flying twigs.

The grenades kept coming, following the same line. Siggan kept going in another direction, and was no longer menaced. At least, for the moment...

Presently, Storm woke up. A shape-shifter, adept at healing himself, he quickly mended most of his body's breakage. But it was a massive drain on his energies.

'If you lend me some energy, I'll be able to run,' he thought to Siggan.

'Can't right now,' she answered, grateful that telepathy did not depend on breath. 'What you really need is food, anyway. And it doesn't seem like a great time to stop and hunt.'

'What we *really* need is to shift somewhere else.'

'But we can't, there's no Pattern here!'

To their rear, the forest was suddenly lit lurid-orange. A wave of heat, laden with the scent of napalm, passed over them. Fortunately, they were out of its area of effect. All it did was put more enthusiasm into Siggan's running.

'How about bird form?' she suggested after a moment.

'Good idea.' Quickly, Storm changed to hawk form and took off. Finding it hard to fly between the trees -- having the same mass in all his forms made him a *big* bird -- he rose above the treetops.

'Look for the airplane!' came a thought from Siggan. 'The one that dropped the napalm!'

Storm looked around, while Siggan scanned psychically.

'Storm, I've found them!' Siggan exclaimed. 'Six people, all in different places, looking into detection screens, calling off coordinates to aim weapon systems at us!'

'How are they detecting us? Psychically?'

'I can't tell. No, not psychically. I don't understand their

machinery. I -- oh, shit, *incoming*!'

Siggan zig-zagged, narrowly avoiding the kill-radius of a large explosion. 'This is for the birds,' she thought. 'There are too many to take care of all at once, and I can't stop to think. I'd better take bird shape, and just get far away from here.'

'Good move. C'mon,' Storm answered.

Meanwhile, he tried to use his shape-shifting ability to change the shape of a nearby tree. Perhaps that way, he could manage something like the effect of Pattern. But he had no luck.

Siggan sprinted in a new, random direction for a few seconds, stopped, stripped off her clothes, rolled up her gun and Trumps in her clothes to make a bundle, changed her shape, and flew off with the bundle in her talons. She was running again before any nasty presents could arrive.

The sky around them was studded with large, hostile airplanes. But after all, Siggan reflected, the attackers were looking for two humans. Hopefully, they just wouldn't notice a couple of large birds, flying down near the treetops.

'Say, Storm, let's turn around and go back. When we leave the woods, it'll look perfectly normal -- you blow up the woods, and the birds fly away at top speed. Who'll give it a second thought?'

'Good thought. A lot of birds are doing it already. Let's go back, and find Uncle Siggan and my horse.'

'Exactly.' So they wheeled, and went back to the region they had just left, carefully skirting the burning areas.

Storm scanned for minds. They were around, of course. But none were focused on him.

Siggan wasn't so lucky. Suddenly, her hawk's eyes picked out a rocket, flying directly toward her. Luckily, her range of vision was extreme. Still, she had only seconds.

She dived in among the trees, zig-zagging frantically, hoping the rocket would follow and be detonated when it ran into a tree.

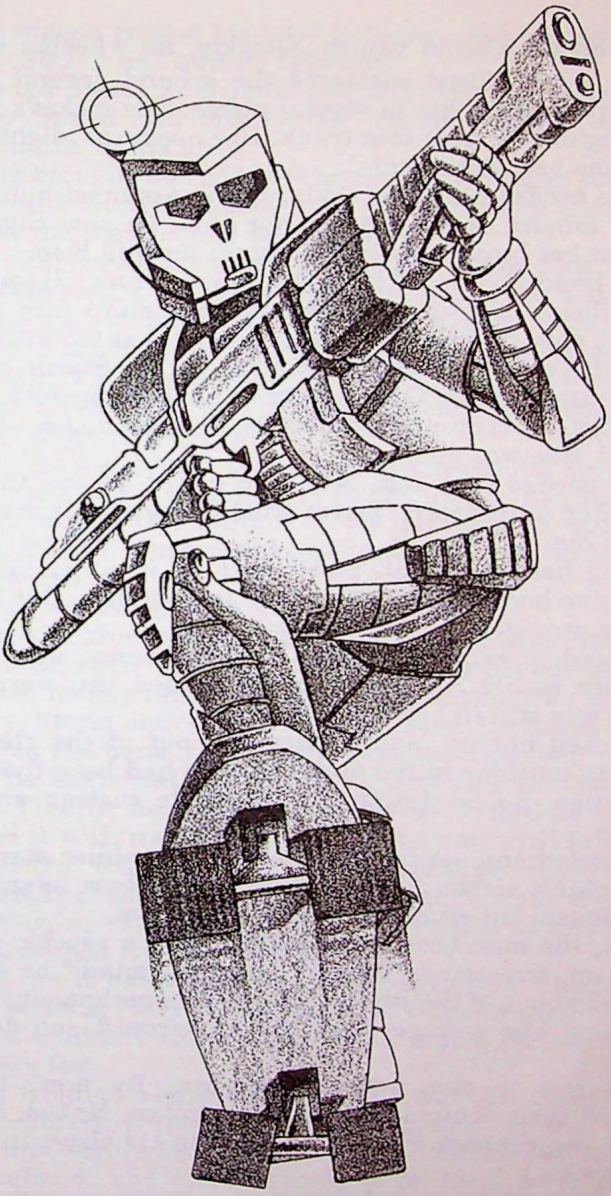
No luck. Suddenly she glimpsed it, directly above her.

She wished she could throw her bundle at the thing, but talons weren't made for that. In fact, the bundle was slowing her down. She dropped it, and tried to zig-zag even faster.

She didn't gain much speed. But the move saved her life anyway. The rocket dived toward her, just as she let go... but it followed the falling bundle, instead of Siggan.

There was an incredible explosion. The shock wave grabbed her in talons of its own, and dashed her into a tree.

That was all she knew.



"Storm! There's a twelve-foot-tall man, in plastic plate armor, rolling along the road on a skateboard. It'd be funny, but he has this enormous rifle..."

Storm felt Siggan's mind vanish. Quickly, he wheeled back and landed next to her. Blood spattered the ground around her, and continued to pump from her in several places. The rocket's blast had mashed her against a large tree trunk. Her neck was slightly askew -- had her spine been damaged?

Hands, he needed hands. Quickly, Storm assumed human form. Even in the minute or so required for this, he saw Siggan stop breathing. But her heart was still pumping: she still bled.

He knelt beside her, and formed a psychic link. Siggan's mind was a bare flicker. Storm tried to push her mind into using its shape-shifting powers. But her half-dead mind was too weak.

Cursing the weakness of his psychic skills, Storm threw his whole mind into making Siggan human. A human with working heart and lungs. He concentrated fiercely. But the flicker of Siggan's mind dimmed. She was going...

Air. She needed air! But, whoever heard of mouth-to-*beak* resuscitation? In desperation, Storm tried it anyway. It was that, or watch Siggan die.

By holding her beak shut, and breathing into her nostrils, he managed to give her some air. Necessity is a mother. But her mind was a little bit stronger.

He managed, then, to force her body to change itself. It took almost all her bodily reserves, but he healed the worst of the damage. She was still in hawk form.

Storm picked her up, and carried her out of the clearing. It seemed best to continue in the direction they had been flying before the interruption. So he did that, meanwhile casting around for hostile minds.

Bingo! Somewhere, not far away, an enemy soldier stared into a strange, blinking screen. The man was somehow searching for Storm and Siggan, but could not seem to find them.

Suddenly, the man became aware of Storm's psychic presence, and jumped up, screaming. "Aaagh! It's in my mind!" he shrieked.

Storm pulled out of the contact, which was perhaps just as well. At once, there was a huge flash, as an aircraft self-destructed overhead.

Storm began to run, carrying Siggan. By now, they had abandoned all their equipment and their clothes. Naked, in human form, Storm ran through the forest, carrying his sister in the form of a huge hawk.

After a time, Storm heard footsteps running towards him. He took cover, and after a moment Uncle Siggan trotted into view. Storm jumped up, overjoyed, and ran over and hugged the old wolf.

"Uncle Siggan, let's get out of here," Storm said urgently. "I'll follow you."

Uncle Siggan bobbed his head in assent, and trotted away. Storm picked up Siggan and quickly followed.

Uncle led Storm at a quick trot to a clearing, where they found the horse Storm had lost earlier. Storm mounted quickly, still holding Siggan in his arms.

Having brought Storm to the horse, Uncle Siggan seemed to want Storm to lead. Storm thought for a moment, then turned the horse away from the road he had seen earlier.

After nearly half an hour's riding, they were deep in the forest, far from those parts which had been touched by the battle.

Feeling a little safer, Storm stopped and examined Siggan. She was stable, but not really improving. He gave her some water, which she drank in a half-conscious state. But she wasn't well enough to eat. Storm ate half the food from the horse's saddlebags, and saved the rest for Siggan, if and when.

Having eaten, Storm concentrated fiercely on the Pattern. He finally managed to establish it in his mind, but it gave him a horrible headache to maintain it. He had no idea what the native Pattern of this Universe might be like, but he tried with all his might to shift towards it.

Nothing was happening. Nothing at all.

Meanwhile, from time to time Storm could hear aircraft engines. By this, he knew he was still being sought by his enemies. However, to his relief, no one came within his psychic range for quite a while.

Finally, Storm noticed that he was naked. He fished out his spare clothes from the horse's saddlebags, and put them on.

Then he examined Siggan again. She still showed no signs of rousing. Finally, he mashed up some of the food he had saved for her, mixed it with water to make a paste, and tried to feed her. She badly needed food, to replace the energy she had used in shape-changing. Besides, Storm felt strongly that they needed to keep moving, to avoid being found. He wanted to fortify Siggan as much as possible, for the journey.

He got her to eat a little. This seemed to help a lot: after a while she even woke up, and ate on her own. But she was still dreadfully weak, and couldn't shape-change too much. So she still wasn't healing very fast.

Storm tried to shape-shift himself through Shadow. Nothing happened. Surely, if he could talk to Siggan... she was the one who had seen this world's Pattern, inside the Gate. Maybe, together, they could visualize it, and find some way to get there. At least, it seemed worth a try.

But Siggan was far too weak for that, yet. If he could just keep them both alive long enough, there might yet be a chance...

Finally, Storm simply lay low for awhile. Siggan eventually reached a half-awake state, where she could eat enough to support shape-shifting. After that, her recovery was rapid. Soon, she was almost well.

They took stock. There were some extra clothes and some food in the horse's saddlebags. But they had no weapons, their powers were severely curtailed, and they had no idea where they were.

"If only we understood the Pattern of this place, we might get somewhere," Storm bemoaned.

Siggan's brow creased in thought. (Part of her shape-shifting had been to become human again, and the shift had further increased her healing.) "The only thing I remember is standing on that ledge, looking up at the stars. And the stars were all Patterns. And I noticed one star, and I looked at it, and... and we were *here*."

She tried picturing the stars again, and looking at a different star instead. But she didn't have a clear enough picture of any of them. She knew the Pattern of Amber's Universe, of course. But it didn't seem like a good idea to try to go *there*, where they had been outlawed.

She visualized the one she had actually fixed on. Somehow, that Pattern corresponded to the Universe where they now found themselves. She put a hand on Uncle Siggan's fur, and Stormbringer seized the horse's bridle, so they wouldn't get separated again.

"Can you move us nearer to the center of the Pattern of this Universe?" Storm asked.

Siggan tried. She thought about the sky, moving toward the local Pattern.

It seemed to work. The color of the sky changed slightly.

Slowly, she got the hang of it. She didn't know what kind of place might be at the center of the local Pattern. But she could shift aspects of the world until they felt "in tune" with the local Pattern.

"I can't move freely through Shadow, here," she explained, in answer to Storm's excited questions. "But I can move toward the local Pattern. Or, perhaps, away from it."

"If we can move *away*, can we get back to where we came from?" asked Storm.

"To where we came from? To where people were trying to *kill* us?" Siggan asked, aghast.

"No, not *there*. To the ridge."

Siggan frowned thoughtfully. "That wouldn't be bad. We could try another star."

So she tried moving *away* from the local Pattern, to a place where the soil was gravelly, like the ridge.

It worked. The soil became more grainy, and the trees got

sparser.

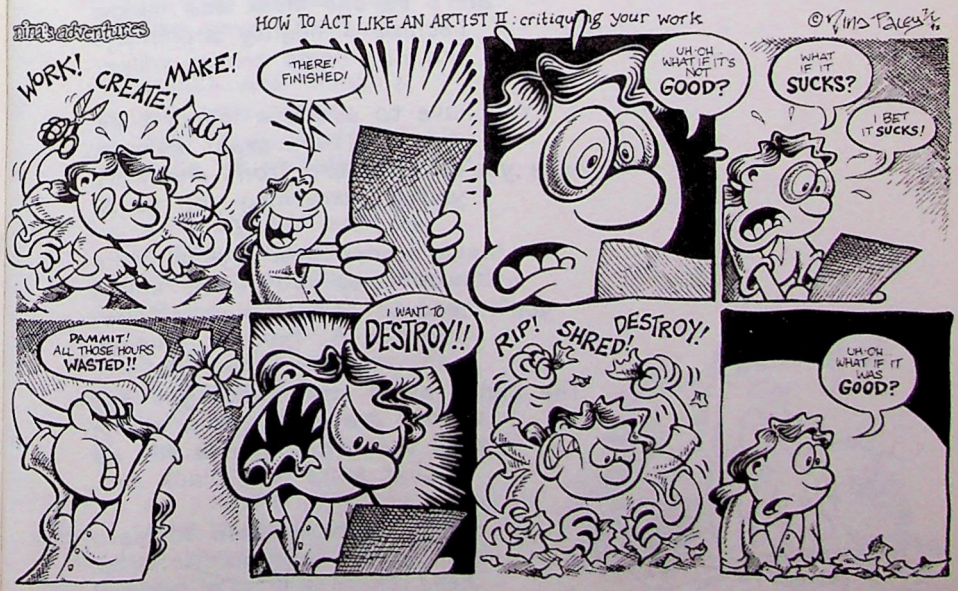
Siggan worked carefully, making the world correspond more and more to the ridge. More and more like the ridge... until they were *on* the ridge, among the stars that were little Patterns in the sky.

"It worked!" she cried. "Now, let's scan some of these Patterns and memorize them. But be careful not to focus too closely on any one of them."

So they did that. They found their "own" Pattern, the one that presumably would take them to the Universe of Amber. But going there still didn't seem like a really good idea.

"Try to concentrate on Dad, and see if we can find him," Stormbringer suggested.

They tried it. They tried very hard...


nina's adventures
HOW TO ACT LIKE AN ARTIST II: critiquing your work
©Nina Paley '06
WORK! CREATE! MAKE!
THERE! FINISHED!
UH-OH... WHAT IF IT'S NOT GOOD?
WHAT IF IT SUCKS?
I BET IT SUCKS!
PAMMIT! ALL THOSE HOURS WASTED!!
I WANT TO DESTROY!!
RIP! SHRED! DESTROY!
UH-OH WHAT IF IT WAS GOOD?

The Archimage

by Kevin Lowry

So you want to be a Mage?
That's admirable, 'tis true,
but do you know the cost, my son?
Be certain that you do!

To spend the years in toil and study,
and trampled underfoot
by some old coot or fuddy-duddy
who isn't very cute.

You might get cuffed upside the head
more than a time or two
but it's most likely well-deserved
to teach a cocky ingenue.

There's wisdom, you see, in phrenology
although it's not a savior—
"a couple well placed lumps on the head
can modify behavior."

But if you want to be a mage,
don't be one meek and minor;
become a mighty archimage
and not some creepy whiner

You have to spend a lot of time
to be a great savant,
but once you've done the front end work
you've everything you want.

Magic wands and crystal balls
won't get you in the union,
you'll need to cast a Number One,
Grade A, Type III, illusion.

The sigils, signs, and wards you see
are only just a start;
it's all the other things you do
that make it a Black Art.

So if you really wish to learn
about the mantic arts,
heed these words of wisdom
to avoid some bad mis-starts:

Ecology and economy
should influence your movements,
and a bit of "good ol' R & D"
should yield a few improvements.

Chanting, chiming, music, and rhyming—
gesticulations too—
weave your spells in Gordian knots
and dip them in some glue.

Summonings and squealing things—
they really are a riot,
but alchemy and awful smells
will make you want to diet.

Lucky charms and rabbits' feet
may give you some small solace,
but think how bad the rabbit feels
for helping you through all this.

Yoga and the tantric arts
may help to cure your ails,
but as for me, I'd rather not
sleep on a bed of nails.

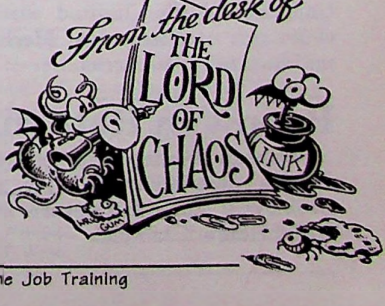
Herbalists can make a tea,
philtre, or apothec'ry
pharmaceutical preparation
to promote your urination.

Enchantments and illusions,
add to the arts arcane,
there's also magic black & white
and gardens of wolfsbane.

There's wizardry and sorcery
and even thaumaturgy,
there's incantation and exhortation
applied to old zymurgy.

A wreath of garlic can prevent
nocturnal visitation
by not just vampires and undead
but all the gol' durn nation.

So now do you see just what I mean
when I tried to warn you?
A hundred years of OJT*
can really start to bore you.



* OJT = On the Job Training

Coming attractions

More & Bigger, Bigger & More

Try as we might, we just couldn't squeeze all the neat stuff in this issue into a paltry 160 pages. Hence the expansion to 192 pages...

Just in case you were wondering, we've got some big plans for *Amberzine*. As our subscriber list grows toward that magic 1,000 mark, we'll be able to pick up the frequency of publication, increase the page size, and, who knows, maybe one day we'll even see a little spot of color in these pages!

Zelazny's Coming!

Next issue we'll feature our first Roger Zelazny piece. It's only a short piece, originally published as the "Prolog" for the 500 copies of the Underwood-Miller limited edition of *Trumps of Doom*. Just Merlin's initiation into the Logrus...

Bronwyn Returns

Enough with the nasty letters & vicious demands! We give up! *Bronwyn's Tale* will return next issue. Here's a sample:

...I reached out with my good hand and gave him a shove that sent him sprawling on the floor. He stayed there, groveling, which appealed to my sense of esthetics. I stepped over his flailing limbs and sat down on the throne.

*"Now, Lance... tell me... **who's**... the Queen of the Abyss?"*

He glared at me, furious, and started to rise. I thought he was going to do something foolish, so I kicked him squarely in the chest and sent him to the floor again. This time, he stayed where he belonged.

He mumbled something in a voice too low for me to hear.

"Louder!"

"You are," he whispered.

*"I can't hear you. I am... **what? Say it Lance.**"*

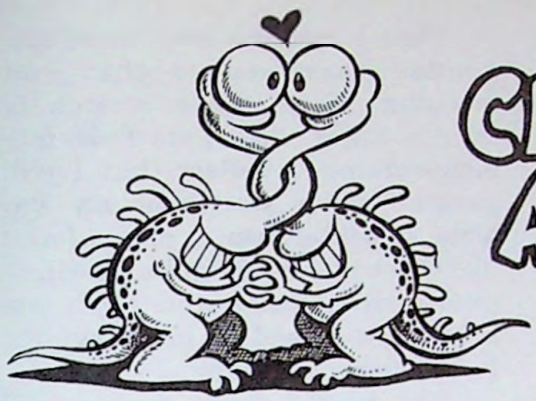
*"**You're the Goddamn Queen of the Abyss, Bronwyn!**" he shouted, and I sat back with a satisfied sigh. Boy, did **that** sound good...*

"Nice of you to say so, Lance," I told him, "And now that we've got that out of the way, you and I are going to have a little chat..."

A Dark World...

Way off in *Amberzine #5*, we've got a very special treat in store for you. We've obtained the rights to Heny Kuttner's novel, *The Dark World*, first published in 1946, and out of print since 1965.

If you're wondering why, just bear in mind that this is one of Roger Zelazny's favorites, and he's promised to write a piece telling us all about it. We don't want to give away much more, but... It's about this guy named *Ganelon*...



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PERSONALS

M., maybe I can marry someone immutable after all. I can always change to suit you. Your fuzzy-wuzzy, G.

To all the Amber players at GENCON 92, great meeting you all, guys. Saty Fluffy. Luv, John Davies, English Lord of Chaos. John Davies, 17 Garry Way, Rise Park, Romford, Essex RM1 4YU, ENGLAND.

DADDY: We didn't mean it. Really! You can come out now. P.S.: Where did you hide the Jewel instructions?

GAME MASTERS WANTED

ISRAEL. Is anyone in Israel playing *Amber*? Contact me. Eyal Teler 25 Nave Shaanan, Jerusalem 93708 Israel. Tel: 02-635763.

BROOKLYN. Read all the books five times, and created characters ad infinitum. Now I want to play! Jonathan Riseling, 187 Columbia Height, Brooklyn NY 11201 or 1-718-935-9511.

CENTRAL CONNECTICUT. One amazing GM wanted - we have pool of experienced players - need playground for our imaginations. Call Bob at (203)-229-9008.

PLAYERS WANTED

Looking for those of Amber or Chaos blood to save the universe, meeting in the Eau Claire, Wisconsin area. Ryan Cronwell, 539 Lake Street, Eau Claire WI 54703 or (715)-833-8599.

Las Vegas area. Contact: Cat Hauglin, 5480 Cortina Avenue, Las Vegas, NV 89122-1827.

ORGANIZATIONS

CALIFORNIA. Eric Snider (Harlan) & John Speck (Godfrey), original 1985 play-testers, seeking California role-players & GMs. Write c/o Delta-Tao, 760 Harvard Ave, Sunnyvale CA 94087 or 408-730-9351.

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NEW JERSEY CABAL seeks others interested in putting on AMBERCON EAST. Write Carol Dodd, 353 Vista Drive, Hunters Chase, Marlton, NJ 08053.

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Borric, son of Julian. Last seen jumping into the Abyss for no good reason. Contact Gertrude c/o Prince Julian.

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by Carol Dodd

My headlights cut a swath along the great black ribbon of the road as I race the sunrise northeast, up the Jersey Turnpike. It is 5:00 A.M. I make this run each day, from my home in the clean, green edge of the pine barrens to the congested industrial region of the state. Sixty-five miles, each way. I start out in the night and drive into the day, it seems, from world to world.

I think it's a lot like shifting Shadow.

In clear weather, the trip begins under a vast blanket of stars, and as I head north into the thicker air of the urban areas, they fade to a twinkling few. Now the black sky is tinged with a sullen red. Mundane reason informs me that its the reflection of neon store lights along the maze of highways that span our small state. Imagination tells another tale.

In the glow, strange fires are suggested; the Plains of Gehenna stretching into the dawn. I wonder what ghostly riders share this road with me, and what exotic adventures they will have along the way...

A white Ferrari cuts across my path, shooting over three empty lanes, and hurtles into the darkness ahead. In the distance, it's taillights top the rise and disappear. Who is pursuing it?

A glance at my speedometer warns me I'm doing 75 mph. I slow. I'm not in that much of a hurry. I resist the urge to follow that demon-driver. Where he's headed is obviously no place for mortals like me!

Then comes the gray time, suspended between night and morning. Here, for a stretch of twenty miles, all colors fade into monochrome. I reflect that I will pass a similar stretch on my way home this afternoon. A place *almost* like this one, but not quite. It will be immersed in color and light and sound. Yes. Heading home again... I will subtract the gray...

The traffic grows denser as I near my destination. The faces of drivers flash past me, suspended for a moment in time. Each is intent on it's own thoughts or problems. Why would the guy in the blue BMW look so worried? Big business deal... or something else? Is there a story here?

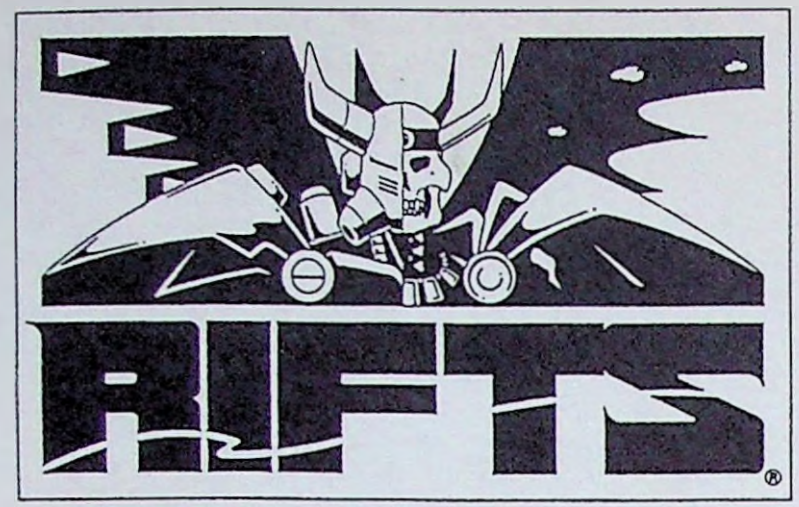
I leave the turnpike and drive onto Route 287 where the traffic moves more slowly. This stretch runs about 2 miles, for me. It passes the back of my work place and I can see the dock-lights gleaming through the thin stand of trees along the highway. But you 'can't get thar' from here...' Like many Shadows, you must travel away first, before you can cut back in to your destination.

I drive another half-mile, take the exit ramp that tunnels down beneath the roadway, and past the eerie lights and inexplicable structures and tanks of the refinery to my right. What strange forces do they harness here. Pattern? Logrus?

It's just my ride to work, of course. I don't live in a fantasy world, but must constantly create and describe them for my players.

I am the Game Master, so every daily occurrence, no matter how commonplace, reveals descriptions and scenario vignettes.

I take from the real, to feed the unreal.



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